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The Spirit Child Phenomenon and the Nankani Sociocultural World

by

Aaron R. Denham

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation addresses the sociocultural context and multivocal discourse surrounding the perception and practice of "infanticide" among the Nankani people of Northern Ghana. Although the primary causes of infant and child mortality are related to parasitic and environmental factors, local discourse suggests that a number of these deaths are facilitated through intentional poisoning by family members. Community members and respondents ranging from expectant mothers to NGO physicians posit that deformed or ailing children, births concurrent with tragic events, or children displaying unusual abilities are "spirit children" sent to destroy the family. My ethnographic research uncovered significant variation in the ways in which families perceive and respond to spirit children, and the role the phenomenon serves in highlighting larger sociocultural processes, health issues, and what is "at stake" for the family, clan, and community. In practice, I found that the active infanticide of children in northern Ghana is rare, and the details concerning the spirit children practice are often misunderstood. The spirit child practice is not a "savage" act of infanticide, or just a simple response to infant fitness or environmental and economic conditions. Rather, the spirit child is a phenomenon grounded within local health concerns, behavioral taboos, boundaries between the "house" and "bush," ambiguity, reproductive imperatives, concerns about the management of misfortune, and a complex explanatory model regarding wellness, normality, and disability. While the central topic of this dissertation addresses the spirit child specifically, this project ultimately represents broader sociocultural themes within Nankani society.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

What is a Spirit Child?

The subject of this dissertation is the spirit child phenomenon among the Nankani people living in the Upper East Region of Ghana. Although the primary causes of infant and child mortality throughout northern Ghana are parasite diseases and environmental factors, local discourse suggests that a number of infant and child deaths are facilitated through intentional poisoning by family members. In these cases, deformed or ailing children, births concurrent with tragic events, or children displaying unusual abilities are regarded as spirit children sent "from the bush" to cause misfortune and destroy the family. From the Nankani perspective, spirit children are not human, but bush spirits masquerading as such. From a biological perspective, we can say many of these children are disabled or chronically ill, though some others are, as described by community members, attractive or intelligent. Various stakeholders within the community—community members, population health researchers, development workers—describe the spirit child practice as a form of ritual infanticide but the spirit child remains the subject of considerable speculation and is frequently misunderstood.

When I first learned of the spirit child, it was under this rubric of ritual infanticide. As my ethnographic research progressed, however, I found a tremendous amount of variation in how families perceive and respond to spirit children, and the role the phenomenon serves in accentuating the larger sociocultural processes and issues at stake for the family and community. Moreover, at the conclusion of my research, I questioned if the spirit child was indeed a form of infanticide, as elements of the practice are more akin to what could be described as euthanasia. This dissertation examines the multivocal spirit-child discourse and practices and the related ethnographic context and sociocultural themes that are foundational to Nankani society.

During my initial research, I found that the available literature regarding the spirit child offered valuable yet incomplete insights into the phenomenon. The studies lacked context, ethnographic depth, and evidence that extended beyond community discourse and hearsay. Accounts from local researchers were helpful but were often ambiguous.

During the formative phase of this project, I quickly learned that despite the interest, attention, and speculation directed towards the practice by researchers and other stakeholders working in northern Ghana, few had a holistic understanding of the spirit child or had approached the spirit child and its ethnographic context as the focus of study. Within the literature, I found it difficult to determine how exactly Nankani community members interpreted the spirit child and what was happening in practice.

I found that most stakeholders had differing ideas about the spirit child and few spoke to others about it. Some people understood the spirit child as a legitimate cause of misfortune and death in families; others described it as an easy way to cope with unwanted or sick children; still others viewed it as a primitive practice grounded in ignorance and in need of complete eradication. Many overestimated the extent of the problem and did not take into account the difference between how people talked about the spirit child—which indicated that infanticide was rampant—and what was happening in practice. A common perception held by all was that the spirit child was a significant community health problem. My research was to establish, however, that the spirit child is not necessarily a *major* community health issue, but is symbolic of and connected to the larger health issues confronting families in the region—severe malaria and cerebral spinal meningitis, as examples—and the broader social concerns regarding the integrity and boundaries of the family system.

During a pre-fieldwork study at the Navrongo Health Research Centre (NHRC), the local collaborating institution for this project, I found that researchers frequently encountered the spirit child as a cause of death in children, often appearing as an anomaly within demographic trends and within community discourse. Within the NHRC culture itself, the spirit child was active in the discourse and moral imaginations of many. Since staff members were primarily from the nearby communities, nearly all knew of or had a story about a spirit child. During this pre-fieldwork trip, I found that the discourse concerning the spirit child was extensive, varied, and often subject to "wayward mythologizing" (Waldram 2004:190).

For example, at the NHRC, the discursive dimensions of the spirit child phenomenon reach its utmost symbolic expression during the spirit child drinking "ceremony" held at the research centre. Traditionally, overseas visiting researchers bring a bottle of liquor to share with other researchers or project members. On the designated evening, staff meet at the local drinking spot and order various beverages. At a midpoint in the evening, a senior researcher—a symbolic "concoction man," the English term for the ritual practitioner specialized in treating the spirit child—stands, thanks everyone for attending, offers words of appreciation to the powers that be, and explains the ritual at hand: The need to kill the bottle of spirits—the spirit child—standing on the middle of the table. As the bottle is passed carefully around the table as though it's a baby, the speaker remarks that the spirit has been causing problems for the "family" and must be dealt with in the traditional manner. He exclaims that the spirit child must be sent to the bush (or forest), since that is the only way to liberate us from our misfortunes. When he has finished, the concoction man takes the bottle of spirits and in one swift motion twists its neck, breaking the seal. All present emit a sigh of relief. A small libation is poured for the ancestors (the researchers that came before us), the bottle is passed around the table, and the spirits are, in effect, "killed." As the bottle is consumed, the metaphor for sending the spirit child back to the bush becomes integrated into one of making the participants "go bush"—the local term for becoming intoxicated.

This pre-fieldwork experience was my first glimpse into one particular type of a spirit child ceremony, worthy of its own analysis and comparison. Throughout the next year I would observe other vastly different spirit child ceremonies. Seven months after the pre-fieldwork trip, I returned to Ghana with the clear goal of studying the spirit child as a form of discourse and investigating what this discourse tells us about the Nankani social and cultural world. I also wanted to understand what is happening in practice when someone says his or her child is a spirit child.

Organization of the Dissertation and Project Intentions

The overriding concern of this dissertation is to clarify, interpret, and situate the spirit child phenomenon within the context of Nankani society. This is addressed in two sections herein. First, I provide a thorough ethnographic examination of the fundamental sociocultural elements of Nankani society (chapters 3 through 5). This examination provides essential background on the Nankani people and the contextual information necessary for understanding the spirit child phenomenon. Second, I describe the spirit child phenomenon and the themes it evokes within the Nankani sociocultural world (chapters 6 through 9). While the central topic of this dissertation addresses the spirit child specifically, this project ultimately represents broader social concerns and cultural themes within Nankani society.

I describe the contributions of each chapter specifically. The remainder of chapter 1 describes the anthropological approaches to infanticide, the depiction of the spirit child in the literature, and anthropological depictions of similar practices recorded in West Africa. Chapter 2, *Methods and Context*, describes the theory and methods used in this project, elements of Nankani history, and contextual information. Chapter 3, *For the House*, describes the Nankani "house" or family, the central role of ancestors, and the notion of Nankani personhood, which are essential to understanding how the spirit child threatens the integrity of the house and challenges the notion of personhood. Chapter 4, *Transforming Ambiguity: Divination and the Creation of Meaning*, mediates the dialectic between the house (chapter 3) and the bush (chapter 5) by exploring the central role that divination plays in making sense out of and narrating misfortune and events within the family. Divination is one of the primary means of interpreting an ambiguous child's behavior and ultimately detecting and confirming a spirit child's presence within the house. Chapter 5, *For the Bush*, describes the "bush" or uninhabited space and its ambiguous role as a source of new knowledge and as a threat to the integrity of the house. This chapter describes the entities inhabiting the bush that are related to the spirit child. Chapter 5 also describes how social change and notions of modernity are linked with contemporary notions of the bush and knowledge acquisition. Inspired by Bashkow's (2006) work concerning the meanings associated with knowledge and whitemen in Papua New Guinea, I describe the impact and local perceptions of modernity and offer a vignette discussing modernity, ambiguous boundaries, and the whiteman.

The second half of this dissertation addresses the spirit child specifically. Chapters 6 and 7 provide an in-depth description of the spirit child phenomenon, while chapters 8 and 9 are primarily interpretive. I structure chapter 6, *Spirit Child Accounts*, around community discourse and narratives concerning the spirit child, describing the diversity within the spirit child practice and highlighting the diagnostic criteria, treatments, and rituals used to send the spirit back to the bush. Chapter 7, *Case Studies* *on the Spirit Child,* describes my experience with four spirit children I followed during my research. Chapter 8, *Parental Sentiments and Decision-Making*, approaches the complex topic of sentiments surrounding child morality and spirit child decision-making processes. It emphasizes that although the region has a high infant and child mortality rate, child death is not easier for families to bear. Finally, chapter 9, *Conclusions: Clarifying Ambiguity, Boundaries, and Moral Worlds*, brings the knowledge gained from the previous chapters to bear on an analysis that articulates what the spirit child discourse and practice tell us about family concerns and boundaries within the Nankani sociocultural world. I conclude with the consideration that elements of the spirit child practice are similar to Euro-American understandings of euthanasia.

Overall, the intentions of this dissertation are to:

1) Articulate a clear understanding of the spirit child phenomenon within the eastern sub-district of the Kassena-Nankana District in Ghana.
2) Describe the key sociocultural elements within Nankani society that contextualize and shape the spirit child phenomenon.
3) Facilitate an understanding of the Nankani social and cultural world through a close examination of the symbols, meanings, and existential concerns within the spirit child phenomenon.
4) Emphasize that the spirit child practice is not a barbaric act of infanticide, but is instead a complex way of dealing with social, medical, and political-economic issues confronting families within an economically impoverished and politically marginalized region.

Researching and Representing Infanticide

> I neither defend, nor celebrate, nor condemn this practice born of misery and of greatly reduced life chances. I want only to understand it. It is there, it is spoken about, and I have seen it (Scheper-Hughes 1988:259).

Infanticide is for many people a "dirty" word that conjures up various negative associations. Many contemporary anthropologists have been reluctant to study or discuss it, since researching and representing a sensitive topic like infanticide is fraught with challenges. This is hardly surprising, since various organizations and the media often characterize such acts and people as "savage" or "pathological"—a first step towards viewing them as moral inferiors (Hrdy 1999:294). Sensitive to these concerns, some anthropologists have hesitated to publish data that could be used to justify political intervention (Hrdy 1999) or support racist agendas. This sensitivity is understandable but also unfortunate, since there are few experience-rich accounts that focus on the local understandings and moral frameworks that could counter such misconceptions of barbarity.

As anthropologists, we can continue to avoid the topic. However, as we do, population health scholars, international development organizations, and other parties push forward with their own research and intervention agendas that have the potential to further perpetuate misconceptions. Moreover, when we look back on various failed aid interventions worldwide, we see that attempts to eradicate practices that are deeply enmeshed within the broader social and cultural milieux prove to be problematic, often serving only to further isolate people. Rushing headlong to help people should be prefaced and moderated by careful ethnographic research to determine if, for example, the problem is indeed a pressing issue or a well-meaning exercise in chasing spirits. As anthropologists, we have the research tools necessary to address sensitive issues such as infanticide. In the cases where we choose to remain silent, this silence could be doing more harm than good.

With that said, how do we go about it? How do we avoid Orientalizing cultural practices? First, a holistic, experience-rich, and in-depth ethnographic research approach is essential. Second, and most importantly, we need to "illuminate what may seem an exotic world and show it to be made of ordinary people—who have emotions and relationships that are recognizable to distant strangers. And yet, those emotions and relationships are often constructed quite differently from how they might be in the West" (Gottlieb & Graham 1993:xvii). This dissertation is a step towards building an interpretive bridge that facilitates a closer understanding of what appears as a distant cultural practice. Third, one must use care in the representational process, as public reactions to what are commonly called "harmful traditional practices," such as female genital cutting (FGC), can be manipulated with pictures or words. This process involves a "bracketing" of assumptions in an effort to understand the local perspective. Shweder explains:

> If we want to understand the true character of this cultural divide in sensibilities it may make good sense to bracket our own initial (and automatic) emotional/visceral reactions and to save any powerful conclusive feelings for the end of the argument, rather than have them color or short-circuit all objective analysis. Perhaps, instead of simply deploring the 'savages,' we might develop a better understanding of the subject by constructing a synoptic account of the inside point of view (2000:213).

Constructing Infanticide Accounts

The most frequently cited studies on infanticide conclude that history and ecological constraints interact in complex ways to produce different solutions to unwanted births or children, or that environmental constraints place pressure on families faced with misfortune or difficult circumstances. Consequently, the sociobiological or economically-oriented models dominate the scholarship on topics from infanticide to maternal instincts. It is unfortunate, however, that these models do little to give us the synoptic or holistic accounts that have the potential to counter misconceptions of barbarity.

Often, when I discuss the spirit child practice, people initially have questions regarding themes such as sex ratios or twin taboos, matters commonly associated and relegated to the infanticide discourse. In an effort to allay these often sociobiological curiosities immediately, I outline a few demographic figures. First, I found no gender preference and no twin discrimination. The spirit child is not a form of birth control. It appears relatively unaffected by seasonal variation. Most of the deaths attributed to the spirit child occur before the first year of life, but community members also reported a few rare adult cases.

My description and analysis steers away from these sociobiologically-related perspectives for several reasons. It is not that I find these models ineffective, since they do provide valuable insights into the human condition. I am setting them aside first because I feel that they are forms of "thin description" that do not capture the richness of lived experiences, choices, and associated meanings. They are a distant way of explaining what is happening. Second, I also want to avoid making behavioral comparisons between people and animals, since such comparisons not only face representational challenges, particularly in the non-academic discourse, but risk glossing over important variables that demonstrate how human behavior is inherently more complex. Humans, for example, "unlike other animals … are able to consciously make choices counter to their self-interest" (Hrdy 1999:460). Finally, the predominance of both scholarly and popular discourse on infanticide is based upon an ecological and sociobiological paradigm. Alternative perspectives are needed.

Sociobiological paradigms do not dominate infanticide research because scholars are being intentionally vague or generalizing. Too frequently researchers are faced with the fact that "good data" doesn't exist, primarily because this is not the easiest subject for families to talk about and, oftentimes, researchers find that they must withhold their data for ethical reasons. Hrdy and Hausfater note that it is rare to have firsthand information from parents who have decided to commit infanticide (1984:xxvii). Sargent, in her research with the Bariba people, remarks that it was difficult to get information on infanticide practices and *indirect* approaches to eliciting information were most profitable (1988:87). The difficulty in talking to people about child mortality, choice, and the general lack of first-hand accounts potentially forces some scholars to rely on hearsay or dated ethnographic information that has the potential to become more fantastic each time it is reused.

Indeed, much of the data that infanticide theories and literature reviews are based upon are not only dated, but also potentially biased and inaccurate (cf. Hill & Ball 1996, Schrimshaw 1984). Waldram (2004) describes how scholars writing about Aboriginal North American culture-bound syndromes, such as windigo psychosis, have perpetuated assumptions about Aboriginal people by using dated or questionable research and inappropriately mythologizing practices. Upon a close examination of biased ethnographic and historical materials, Waldram found that Aboriginal culture-bound disorders "have their origins in the imaginations of scholars rather than the cultures of the original inhabitants of North America" (2004:190). It appears that scholars and non-scholars often prefer a good story to the ethnographic facts.

I am thus compelled to ask, like Waldram, to what degree is the construction of the spirit child "tangled in the ruins of folklore, errant historical documents, and naïve scholarship" (2004:211)? What role does community discourse concerning the spirit child or child mortality play in constructing what happens in practice? Since infanticide is framed as something that "those people" do, how much of, or what dimensions of, the spirit child phenomenon are the product of the outsider's imagination, an imagination distorted by centuries old depictions of a savage Africa? This dissertation clarifies the spirit child and more importantly places it within the larger context in which the phenomenon dwells. I begin this task by examining the existing scholarship on infanticide and the spirit child.

Literature Review

Infanticide Practices and the Spirit Child

Within a scholarly context, infanticide has been defined in various ways. Most often it is defined as the willful death of a newborn, but it is also used to describe the death of older children without reference to age (Scrimshaw 1984:440). More specific terms are often used, such as neonaticide—killing an infant within hours of its birth; infanticide—killing a child up to one year of age; and, filicide—the murder of a son or daughter older than one year (Schwartz 2000:1). Others suggest using a range of terms, such as foeticide, infanticide, and pedicide, to describe the wide age range at which intentional child death occurs (Scrimshaw 1984:440).

Despite the variability in terms used to describe the induction of a child's death, I will use the term *infanticide* through this dissertation to refer to deliberate behavior that is likely to lead to the death of a dependent (see similarity to Scrimshaw 1984:442). This includes deliberate killing, placing a child in a dangerous situation, abandonment, and what Scrimshaw (1984) describes as "lowered biological support." That is passive infanticide through underinvestment or selective neglect. Abortion, accidental death, and death resulting from excessive physical punishment are not included in the scope of this review and my work.

Cultural and historical analyses have demonstrated that infanticide is widely distributed culturally, historically, and geographically; "rather than being the exception, it has been the rule" (Williamson 1978:61). For example, the ethnographic literature indicates that in parts of Nigeria, twins were previously regarded as bad omens and were promptly killed at birth (Bastian 2001). In parts of the Sudan, twins are left in baskets atop trees so they may take flight in their bird forms (Senah 1993 in Allotey & Reidpath 2001). The Yaudapa Enga of New Guinea abandon select children to be whisked off and reared by supernatural beings (Scrimshaw 1984). For the Bariba people of Benin, physically stigmatized infants may be rejected as malevolent "witch-babies" (Sargent 1982). The historical literature highlights how unwanted or undesirable European infants were abandoned (Piers 1978) or given to overburdened wet nurses with full knowledge the infant would not survive (Hrdy 1999).

The biological/physical anthropological literature indicates that at least 91 mammalian species have displayed forms of infanticide (Ebenspeger 1998), resulting in numerous attempts to draw comparisons between other species and human populations (Hrdy 1984). Socio-cultural anthropologists have established that global and local political economies and structural violence play a significant role in child health and survival (Leatherman 2005, Scheper-Hughes 1998). Scheper-Hughes (1992) describes adult economic opportunities and constraints as influencing the level of parental investment in children. Specific ecological perspectives pit survival or investment strategies against limited resources, and tout fitness-related evolutionary theories (Winterhalder & Alden-Smith 2000). Socio-biological perspectives identify children of poor phenotypic quality (determined by the presence of deformity or illness) as also being at risk for infanticide (Daly & Wilson 1984). In a comprehensive literature review, Hill and Ball categorize the most common reasons for infanticide as including low likelihood for survival, inadequate resources, twins, gender preference, or abnormal births (1996:382).

Due to the lack of contemporary accounts and reliable historical and ethnographic records, few detailed descriptions or interpretations of infanticide practices extend beyond cursory or anecdotal data that is potentially inaccurate or misrepresented. Additionally, due to the sensitivity and difficulty investigating the topic, full length or detailed ethnographic accounts concerning infanticide or selective neglect are few (Scheper-Hughes 1992). Anthropological accounts addressing infanticide are often a result of side projects, that is, secondary projects that emerged or captivated the researcher's attention while conducting investigations into another topic. Consequently, anthropological accounts of infanticide and selective neglect are limited and often receive only brief mention in larger ethnographic works.

For example, the popular ethnography *Nisa* contains several sections discussing infanticide decision-making (Shostak 1981). Shostak describes how decisions in favor of infanticide were "never made lightly or without anguish, but sometimes there was little choice" (1981:66). Such choices were rare (1981:19), and when they occurred there were no moral consequences, as the infant was regarded as not a "true person" (Shostak 1981:66-67). Literature reviews and theories concerning infanticide such as those of Scrimshaw (1984) extrapolate remarks from books like *Nisa*, removing the practices from their context and reductionistically framing them into a table of *cultures* that practice infanticide. The resulting black and white depictions not only have no indication as to the contemporaneity of practices, but also no indication of the context of how or why families make such decisions. Such depictions risk leaving readers with inaccurate generalizations about groups that could result in blanket assumptions such as "!Kung" or other "tribal people" practice infanticide while "Canadians" do not.

The historical literature often draws on outdated anthropological references that cite common reasons for infanticide in "primitive" societies. Swain, in reference to Aboriginal Australians, remarks on how anthropological depictions of the "universality" of infanticide in nomadic societies commonly accept and "argue that a disabled child, a twin, or an infant born when an older sibling still needed to be carried was unlikely to survive the harsh environment in which Aboriginal people lived" (2006:87). Swain notes that the common depictions of infanticide accounts were contaminated by the fears or biases of the observer, and that truly neutral accounts of infanticide are non-existent (Swain 2006:89).

Popular Euro-American accounts of infanticide in regards to Africa specifically characterize it with reference to ignorance, backwardness, superstition, or as a harmful traditional practice. In regards to North America or Europe, I found that infanticide is often characterized as euthanasia, child abuse, or the result of maternal mental illness—primarily individual centered characterizations—while African or other non-Euro-

American practices, for example, are viewed as harmful traditional practices (Winter, et al. 2002) and are never far from implying broader sociocultural deficiencies or defects.

Although historically there have been recent practice and social acceptance of infanticide in Europe and North America, the accounts and the historical memory of infanticide are largely absent. Within the European context, the spread of Christianity forbade longstanding Celtic or Germanic traditions, for example, of disposing of unwanted infants (Hrdy 1999:464). Despite its perceived sinfulness and the legal prohibitions, infanticide and selective neglect remained a common way for parents to deal with undesirable or non-viable infants from the Middle Ages through the Industrial Revolution.

Piers remarks that while the public pays increasing attention to child abuse and child welfare in North America, infanticide has "mysteriously vanished from public consciousness" (1978:13). Her accurate and timely characterization marked the beginning of a surge in infanticide research. A literature review examining publications spanning from 1900 to 2003 revealed that 90 percent of the literature concerning infanticide appeared after 1976 (Bechtold & Graves 2006). This review also examined the geographical focus of infanticide studies, finding that 40 percent of the studies focused on Europe, while Africa, South America, and Australia constituted only thee percent of the total (Bechtold & Graves 2006:9-13). Bechtold and Graves also found that historically based research made up the majority of infanticide studies.

Depictions of infanticide tend to emphasize the rationale while ignoring the moral complexities and local interpretations behind the practices (James 2000:176). As mentioned earlier, reviews of infanticide tend to recycle information into tables in efforts to depict other cultures' socioeconomic goals or strategies that maximize fitness (cf. Hrdy & Hausfater 1984:xxvii , Scrimshaw 1984). Data recycling risks the propagation of ethnographic inaccuracies within both the scholarly and popular discourse. For example, the popular assumption that the Spartans destroyed weak or unwanted children by throwing them into a pit was recently invalidated by archaeological evidence conducted near the foothills of the famed Mount Taygete. The lead archeologist remarked, "It is probably a myth, the ancient sources of this so-called practice were rare, late, and imprecise" (Agence France Presse 2007:1).

Why Practice Infanticide?

Accounts of infanticide tend to use sociobiological paradigms to theorize or reach a consensus as to why infanticide occurs. Hrdy claims that mothers use infanticide as a reproductive strategy to maximize infant quality over quantity. Moreover, she characterizes such decision-making as an innate biological ability, presenting mothers with a range of options ranging from infanticide to various degrees of neglect (Driscoll 2005:272, Hrdy 1999:297). Hrdy continues, describing how "the sight of a defective newborn is profoundly disturbing," and how these responses to infant characteristics, whether acceptable or not, have an innate component that is also dependent on the "available resources and probable outcomes" (Hrdy 1999:457). She describes how people in industrial societies suppress these responses, implying that those societies that do not repress such aversions are insensitive. Although Hrdy characterizes as innate a mother's sensitivity to certain infant traits (Hrdy 1999:457), I found that sociocultural influences have a far more profound impact on mothers' responses to their infants. Focusing on the social and cultural meanings and variations are just as important as evolutionary paradigms, particularly when considering that universalized reductions tell us little about individual human experiences and decision-making.

From a psychological perspective, Piers describes "basic strangeness," a psychological mechanism observed in mothers who distance themselves from infants they perceive as disturbing. Basic strangeness, or the opposite of empathy, is a state whereby we "turn off toward others and are unable to experience them as fellow human beings" (Piers 1978:38). Piers described it as often a result of poverty and weakness that is associated with the self-centered drive for survival (Piers 1978:39). Such distancing is believed to result in experiencing infants and others as things, not living creatures (Piers 1978:37).

Scheper-Hughes has offered one of the few richly detailed ethnographic accounts of how mothers cope with high infant mortality in the context of poverty (1992). In her study of mother love and child death, Scheper-Hughes adopts an engaged and critical perspective concerning the economic and emotional scarcity. She illustrates how selective neglect is an active survival strategy in face of impoverished conditions. Scheper-Hughes provides a glimpse not into "ordinary lives" but into "short, violent, and hungry lives" (1990:546). She describes how external constraints shape maternal thinking and practice and how conditions of deprivation can turn mothers into "survival strategists in competition with their own offspring." Allowing children to die due to selective neglect (passive infanticide), while considered abhorrent in the Euro-American context, is permissible, since such infants within the local context are understood as not wanting to live.

Twin Infanticide

Twin taboos and twin infanticide are the most commonly depicted and discussed forms of infanticide in Africa. These phenomena have often been regarded by missionaries and the Euro-American public as the quintessential acts of savagery and particularly worthy of a Christian Godly intervention (Bastian 2001). Such popular missionary literature remarked that Igbo people, for example, regarded twins with fear and considered them undeserving of "normal mother-love" (Bastian 2001). Even within the anthropological community, such conceptions that twin births are a primary cause of infanticide persist. The perception that "primitive people" throughout Africa despised twins, while in some cases factual, are largely a product of missionary narratives of twin murder and heroic twin salvation (Bastian 2001:14).

James notes that missionary and anthropological accounts of twin infanticide, as well as abortion and non-twin infanticide, fit the prevailing scholarly and public view that such practices were "merely a matter of good environmental sense" (2000:174-175). Such early—and perhaps some contemporary—perspectives of Africa portray human beings as living close to the earth without moral consequence or sense, being simple and particularly sensitive to primal human urges and environmental conditions. However, new and alternative sources of evidence describe how such practices did not always fit the sensationalist and agenda-driven accounts provided by early anthropologists and missionaries (Bastain 2001). This evidence suggests that what initially appeared to be good environmental sense was in fact much more complicated (James 2000:174)[1]. For example, representations that painted community members as having little or no sensitivity to infants proved inaccurate (James 2000:175).

Witch Babies

In her research among the Bariba in Benin, Sargent found that infants displaying unusual biological features such as neonatal teeth, or born prematurely or in a breech position, are considered witch babies and are killed or abandoned (1988:80). The witch baby practice, which bears several similarities to the spirit child practice, requires according to Sargent, an understanding of the role that witch babies play in the causation of misfortune, and the relationship of misfortune to witchcraft, sorcery, ancestors, and taboo violation. For example, a witch baby might be believed to be making its mother sick (1988:79-80). In addition to the physiological indicators, witch children also do not conform to social and behavioral expectations; for example, a child who shows blatant disrespect for its father could be suspected (Sargent 1988:92).

Sargent found that mothers demonstrated a pervasive concern about having a witch baby. Solitary birth provides the mother flexibility in determining the fate of the child, since she is the primary decision-maker. Not all children born under ambiguous circumstances or with deformities are witch babies, as there is considerable flexibility in the mother's decision. If necessary, the mother may call a midwife to help with her decision (Sargent 1988:84). Calling for help before delivery of the placenta signals to the family that a dangerous child may have been born. After the child has been born, the mother has the power to disclose information that may lead family members to believe that the child is a witch baby (Sargent 1988:83-84). The male head of the house often makes the final confirmation and, if necessary, infanticide and the subsequent purification ceremony is carried out by a ritual specialist (Sargent 1988:84). The loss of such children is not to be grieved due to the harm that such a child can cause the family.

Sargent found that although the threat of witches is powerful, the use of infanticide as a response is becoming rare, particularly within urban areas (1988:91).

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[1] Indeed, this is also the case with the spirit child. I feel that accounts limited to only environmental or ecological perspectives frequently run the risk of simplification and by extension, misrepresentation.

Hospital births also complicate such decisions, since the birthing process has shifted from a private to a public affair (Sargent 1988:86). Although infanticide still occurs, alternatives to the child's death, such as giving the child to missionaries, are described as becoming more common (1988:90). Sargent reported that in towns where people no longer destroy witch babies, elders described such children as "running rampant, threatening their kin on every occasion where they are thwarted or feel envy." A local traditional official remarked that witch children are no longer killed, but are now neutralized or medicated with magical substances (Sargent 1988:90-91).

Snake Children

Dettwyler (1994) describes the local response to children with developmental delays or disabilities. Her informant describes children that never grow, talk, or walk, as being evil spirits. I quote her text at length, as the dialogue is similar to what I also encountered in Ghana (compare to chapter 7). I begin where an elder is describing the snake children to Dettwyler.

> [These children] 'They just never grow. They never reach out for things with their hands, they never sit up or walk, they never talk. Some begin to, but then stop. You keep praying and hoping and looking for medicine for them, but nothing helps.'
>
> 'What happens to these children?' I asked cautiously, holding my breath.
>
> 'Well, if they don't get better after a couple of years, then you know that they are evil spirits, and you give up.'
>
> 'What do you mean, give up?'
>
> 'Well, you take them out into the bush and you just leave them.'
>
> 'What happens to them?'
>
> 'They turn into snakes and slither away' (1994:85-86).

Dettwyler continues, clarifying what she heard, and questioning if any snake children were in the village. Someone replied, "All our women are careful about walking around at night when they are pregnant." The village chief continued and explained how spirits can take over one's child, resulting in a stillbirth, deformity, or a child that never grows. Dettwyler responds:

> 'Yes, I understand now.' I told him. Of course, I didn't really understand. How can anyone understand what it feels like to give up on a child who is hopelessly 'developmentally delayed' –to take the child of your body, the child of your heart, and abandon him or her to the universe? How can anyone who hasn't experienced it understand the heartache of losing a child? I sat there for a moment reflecting on the choices available for the parents of handicapped children in rural Malian culture (1994:86).

In her final comments, Dettwyler emphasizes the important fact that we cannot truly understand what it is like to abandon a child "to the universe," and she is accurate in recognizing the dearth of opportunities for rural handicapped children. However, she inserts, overlays, or projects her expectations and sentiments onto local parental sentiments surrounding disability and child loss, assuming that community members feel the same way about the loss of a snake child.[2] An important question to ask is if snake children are human in local terms. Even given the self-reflexive nature of her comments, such description and representation of a sensitive cultural practice directs readers into incomplete and possibly invalid assumptions, particularly in a later passage where she interprets this data as "exotic" (1994:86). Accurate and in-depth accounts concerning child abandonment and infanticide are rare. Dettwyler's account, like many others, simply consists of two or three paragraphs, little context, and fewer remarks concerning how such decisions are made. I feel it necessary to tell the reader more, rather than letting the phenomenon stand as exotic.

Gottlieb (2000, 1993, 1992), in her research with the Beng people of the Cote d'Ivoire, describes how a pregnant woman who eats while walking along a path in the forest could drop crumbs that will attract a snake. After eating the crumbs, the snake will develop a longing for human food. In its desire for more human food, it will enter the woman and switch places with the fetus. The newborn may appear human, but one day may expose itself as a snake (Gottlieb 1993:136, 2000:64). Locally, physical and behavioral signs such as erratic body movements and language difficulties indicating that a child is developmentally delayed are interpreted as snake-like behaviors. Parents may take the child to a diviner for treatment. If the family forgoes the treatment, community members will harass the child and call it a snake. Gottlieb describes her encounters with disabled adults and is struck by the apparent callousness of community members. Yet she reminds herself that from the local perspective the disabled individual is not regarded as a person. Upon observing one such situation, she questions, "How could that man's sadness be invisible to her? Yet to her he wasn't a man, he was a snake" (1992:136).

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[2] It is important to note that Dettwyler has a child with Downs Syndrome and that this likely influences her perspective.

Gottlieb (1992) describes the process of identifying and confirming a suspected snake person; her description and interpretation however, like Dettwyler's, is brief. In my reading of her text, I waited for a subsequent description of death hastening or infanticide practices, yet there was no mention of what happens after a child is identified as a snake child, beyond a carefully crafted description of those that wander the village as non-persons. This omission, for Gottlieb and possibly Dettwyler as well, was for good reason. Gottlieb remarked that she chose not to further develop or discuss snake children and the related practices due to representational and ethical issues involved in the description and interpretation, since there is a persistent threat that such information could be used against communities and further fuel stereotypes (Gottlieb, personal communication, November 2007).

The Abiku

Ben Okri presented a fictional account of the West African spirit child in his novel *The Famished Road.* He describes the spirit child as a child destined to a repetitive birth-death cycle:

> In that land of beginnings spirits mingled with the unborn. We could assume numerous forms. Most of us were birds. We knew no boundaries. There was much feasting, playing, and sorrowing. We feasted much because of the beautiful terrors of eternity. We played much because we were free. And we sorrowed much because there were always those amongst us who had just returned from the world of the Living … As we approached another incarnation we made pacts that we would return to the spirit world at first opportunity … Those of us who made such vows were known among the Living as abiku, spirit children. Not all people recognized us. We were the ones who kept coming and going, unwilling to come to terms with life. We had the ability to will our deaths (1991:3-4).

Yoruba lore holds that the *abiku* will keep coming back to its mother after its death. If family members suspect a deceased child is *abiku*, or spirit child, a limb is broken or the child is scarred before burial, so when it returns to this world the family will recognize it. Although both are referred to as spirit children, the Yoruba and Nankani accounts differ. The *abiku* are not regarded as malevolent or malicious as the Nankani spirit children are. Although the *abiku* are destined to die and be reborn, tormenting their mothers, they do not have an outright goal of destroying the family. Suspected *abiku* children are treated with traditional medicines to prevent their return to the spirit world (Ogunjuyigbe 2004) and they die on their own. It is possible that the use of the English use of "spirit child" to describe similar practices in northern Ghana has its origins within this Yoruba belief.

The Spirit Child: Early Ethnographic Perspectives

In his work with the Tallensi, Fortes devotes little attention to the world of the bush spirits and other domains peripheral to his focus on the family and clan systems, although he does make an assertion that spirit beings are understood by the Tallensi as bodiless and without mystical rights to intervene in human affairs (1987:260). Despite the close similarities between the Tallensi and the Nankani, his characterization is not valid for the Nankani people, for whom spirits play a major role in the family system and can become embodied beings. Fortes' lack of attention to spirits and the bush is likely a result of a rationalist empirical epistemology that fostered his narrow view of what he considered "superstitious" beliefs.

Fortes does briefly describe how unusual births, primarily twin or triplet births, are a result of *kolkpaaris* (sn. *kolkpaareg*), or "bush sprites" (1949:271). Fortes remarks, "It is believed that *kolkpaares* sometimes quite wantonly enter a woman's womb and are born as twins or triplets, masquerading as incipient humans" (1987:260). If one of the twins dies, it is evidence that it was really a spirit, and is subsequently "buried ignominiously in a special uninhabited place" (1949:271). Fortes also alludes to the idea that what might appear to be a normal human could actually be a *kolkpaareg* masquerading as a human, only to reveal itself upon death, and thus not a full person or social being (1949:329). Although not attributed to twins in today's context, Fortes is clearly explaining the characteristics of a contemporary spirit child.

The Tallensi term *kolkpaares* is similar to the Nankani *kulkarsi* (sn. *kulkariga*), which also signifies bush spirits. Based on Fortes' description of spirits "wantonly entering a woman's womb," of bush burials, and of the revocation of personhood upon the discovery that a person is a spirit, he is describing, at least within the Nankani context, not bush spirits in general (*kulkarsi*), but the contemporary spirit child.[3] Fortes' describes how if a man kills certain "mystically dangerous animals," that is, clan totems or specific and often dangerous wild animals, there is the possibility that his wife will give birth to a "deformed child" (1949:163). Indeed, as we see later, this notion of causation is a part of current spirit child beliefs.

Fortes describes how infancy is a vulnerable time, both physically and mystically. He attributes the "anxiety" hidden behind a new father's joy as being the result of high infant mortality rates. He also describes how anxious fathers will apply medicines around the family compound to protect the child from the intrusion of tree spirits and other dangers.

Fortes alludes to the spirit child within sections of his work, but never develops it completely, possibly because it was infrequently practiced or because he felt it was not important to his work on the social and family structure—although in today's context I illustrate that it is. Although sparse, Fortes' observations indicate that in colonial times the spirit child, in one form or another, existed.

The Spirit Child in Northern Ghana: Contemporary Perspectives

In his study of the Kassena[4] proverbs, Awedoba remarks that the Kassena do not believe that all births are human, as some births are bush spirits "masquerading in human guise with the ultimate object of subverting man" (2000:25). In a project concerning child mortality in the Kassena-Nankana district, Allotey and Reidpath describe spirit children as "not meant for this world—they were spirits who occasionally managed to come to this world to play for a short time and cause distress to the communities to which they belonged" (Allotey & Reidpath 2001:1007).

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[3] *Kinkirigo* is the term used for spirit children near Bolgatanga and near the Tallensi area, and *sisigo* in the Sirigu-Kandiga area. In Kassem the spirit child is known as a *chichuru*.

[4] A neighboring and culturally similar ethic group

According to the literature, spirit children can be identified by a wide range of signs and symptoms. They may exhibit physical anomalies at birth, including unusually large or small heads, spina bifida, premature teeth, or broken limbs. The spirit child can plague the family with various misfortunes. The spirit child's mother may have had a difficult pregnancy or may die during or after childbirth. Other spirit children may cry constantly or become upset if someone stares at them. Families are certain that if they allow the child to live, it will plague the family lineage with bad luck and misfortune and can ruin the family's economic prospects. Spirit children dislike other siblings and can render the parents infertile. Ultimately, a spirit child may kill other family members (Allotey & Reidpath 2001:1009, Awedoba 2000). Awedoba notes that "in the past" such neonates when detected and proved to be non-human were disposed of as soon as possible, often within 24 hours of its birth (cf. Allotey & Reidpath 2001), as it was in the best interest of the family (Awedoba 2000).

Howell, in her research among the Kassena in the Western portion of the KND (Kassena Nankana District), describes how community members suspected a baby with infected eyes was a spirit child. She describes the incident and the spirit child: "So I suggested they take the child to the health post the next day. Another woman standing nearby softly retorted, 'the child is not a child, it is a *chichiru.*' People may classify a *chichiru* as a spirit-related being and not a human being. It may have a prominent physical abnormality or simply have teeth when born" (Howell 1997:224). Howell describes a case where such a woman gave birth to a child that did not grow. The woman explained, "It was a *chichiru.* All the time the child becomes sick, it doesn't grow" (1997:275).

Allotey and Reidpath identify the diviner as being responsible for sacrifices and the child's death (2001). Awedoba identifies a specialized practitioner as central (2000). It is doubtful that Allotey and Reidpath witnessed an actual ceremony or reenactment; nonetheless, they describe the ceremony, most likely based on informant accounts:

> The soothsayer [diviner] is called in and sacrifices are performed around the ancestral rooms of the compound. The soothsayer remains in a room with the child where their spirits battle and they come to an agreement; the

> *Chichuru* has to leave this world. The child is then force-fed a potion of bitter herbs, which in 'really bad' spirit children causes instant death. If the child survives the potion, he or she is left out in the bush far enough away from home so that they cannot crawl back. The mother is allowed to go and get the child after two nights. If after being alone for two nights, the child is still alive, it is believed that there was either a misdiagnosis or that the bad spirit left the child's body (1010).

One documented case of spirit child poisoning by the child's grandmother shows how maternal wishes for the life of her newborn infant were circumvented by the harsher realities of intra-family power relations. Jampana's mother had a particularly complicated pregnancy. The infant was born in the hospital and seemed to be surviving. Despite her mother's protests, however, Jampana's grandmother poisoned the child in the hospital, insistent that the child was a spirit child. The morning after Jampana's death, her mother revealed disbelief: "I don't believe in *Chichuru* and even if everybody else thinks that is what the baby is, I am the one who would be responsible for her so it would not matter" (Allotey 2001: 1010).

Power dynamics surrounding the spirit child may be exacerbated beyond the family level. Jampana was poisoned in a hospital, and was reported as stillborn by the midwife despite her knowledge of the actual cause of death. Similar institutionalized support of infanticide via underreporting of infant deaths in the hospitals of Cuyo Cuyo, Peru has been reported (Larme 1997). Jampana's case aside, the literature describes that as long as ancestral spirits provide most of the diagnoses of spirit children, the male-dominated domain of divination and traditional religion will further restrict a woman's ability to decide the fate of her child (Adongo et al. 1997). Later in this dissertation, we will see the significant role that women play in the diagnosis of spirit children.

Data on the prevalence of the spirit child in the region remains scarce. Allotey and Reidpath remark that "works of fiction, anecdotes, and fireside stories remain the strongest indication of the existence of the spirit child" and that there is little evidence that it actually occurs outside of folk narrative (2001:1008). Thus far, assessments of child mortality data from other studies throughout the KND provide the only available glimpse into its prevalence. The Population Council estimated that 4 percent of child deaths in the KND are due to poisoning of spirit children, but they provided no data and no additional discussion of the phenomenon (Lothian 1996). Although their work appears tentative, Allotey and Reidpath made the only attempt to empirically determine the prevalence of the spirit child within the KND and explain its existence.

While researching tropical diseases and maternal health in traditional and modern contexts, Allotey (1995) attempted to enumerate the spirit child practice. She determined that 15 percent of deaths of infants under three months could be due to the spirit child practice, concluding that the spirit child was a "significant health problem" (2001:1006) and an "important risk factor for infant mortality within the district" (1010). Phillips, et al. estimated that infanticide accounts for 4.9 percent of all neonatal deaths and remarked that in addition to preventing and treating neonatal infections and having a skilled attendant at the delivery, a further reduction in neonatal mortality is achievable with the elimination of infanticide (2005).

In their enumeration of the spirit child as a cause of death, no scholars have direct evidence or indicated that they are positive that the cause of death was actually related to infanticide. No one raises the possibility that family members might simply be using the spirit child as an explanatory model to understand a child's death. For example, when reporting child deaths to researchers who are working within the local demographic surveillance system families might describe a specific infant death as involving a spirit child destined "for the bush"—which signifies infanticide to researchers—when the actual biological cause may be malaria.

Among the available perspectives on the spirit child, various factors may contribute to the spirit child phenomenon within the KND. Examples might include: structural adjustment programs and the establishment of large-scale cash-crop projects (Frimpong-Ansah 1991); the changing value of children within a subsistence-based economy (Adongo, et al. 1997, Nazzar et al. 1995); household decision-making and gender inequality (Adongo, et al. 1997); and, disease, maternal health, and access to healthcare (Catley-Carlson 1998, Allotey 1995, Binka 1995). These factors may be valid underlying causes, but the spirit child practice and infanticide in general nonetheless seems more acute, extreme, and irreversible than any decisions about investment, attention, and relative fitness. Each of these perspectives alone does not adequately describe how families understand and interpret their circumstances nor do they explain the variations that exist within groups.

Project Contributions and Research Questions

Previous investigations into the spirit child have been limited because they have relied upon minimal interaction with families of spirit children, and have not included on-going observation of families in the midst of a spirit child diagnostic and decision-making process. Moreover, some existing depictions of the spirit child are incomplete and tend to blame *tradition*. By doing so, they risk portraying those who believe in the spirit child phenomena as "backward." This project is unique because it is the first known long-term, in-depth ethnographic inquiry into the spirit child phenomenon. Unlike previous examinations of the spirit child, this research:

1) Situates the Nankani spirit child within its larger sociocultural context.
2) Engages and attempts to fairly give voice to the diverse number of community members.
3) Presents detailed case studies and other examples of families with spirit children and follows their decision-making processes.
4) Presents the ceremonial and ritual practices associated with the spirit child.
5) Illustrates the diversity present within the spirit child phenomenon and describes how a large proportion of the spirit child cases are not infanticidal as previously portrayed in the limited literature on this topic.
6) Interprets what the spirit child phenomenon reveals about the broader concerns in Nankani society.

The broader contribution of this research is its rare in-depth description and interpretation of an infanticide practice that accounts for local understandings, personal experiences, and moral worlds within the larger sociocultural context—rather than being limited to only a biologically based paradigm. Indeed, Piers remarks that the non-biological variables concerning infanticide are not well understood, stating, "Neither the socioeconomic and historical setting, nor their intrapsychic motivations, are clear, much less the intertwining of these factors" (1978:13). The gaps in the literature addressing the spirit child, the misunderstandings surrounding the practice, and the unanswered questions concerning the phenomenon shaped the central research questions of this dissertation. These questions, and the chapters that address them specifically, ask:

1) What are Nankani families' experiences of (ch. 7) and sentiments toward spirit children? (ch. 8).

2) What are the common decision-making processes associated with spirit children? (ch. 7, 8). What role does divination play in spirit child decision-making? (ch. 4, 6).

3) What are the circumstances surrounding the death of spirit children? What are the causes of death in spirit children? (ch. 6, 9).

4) What is "at stake" for families and communities with spirit children? (ch. 7, 9).

5) Is it accurate to represent the spirit child phenomenon as infanticide? (ch. 9).

6) What does the spirit child tell us about the broader sociocultural characteristics of Nankani society? (ch. 3-9). On the other hand, to best contextualize the spirit child, what ethnographic domains require examination? (ch. 3-5).

The following chapter discusses my methodological approach and details concerning this project, and the historical, environmental, and health context of the Upper East Region of Ghana.

CHAPTER 2

Methods and Context

Theoretical Orientation

North American anthropology has traditionally been committed to the ideal of holism in research and theory (Hruschka 2005:2). Holistic paradigms can offer a lens that brings into focus the multidimensional variations and diversity of humankind and cultural phenomena. It would be superficial to reduce a phenomenon or practice like the spirit child to strictly external circumstances, some inner biological or psychological essence, or purely subjective or objective terms. Rather, meaning and culture can be found at the intersection of these variables. Accordingly, the present study crosses numerous sub-domains within anthropology and specifically considers paradigms from sociocultural, medical, and psychological anthropology, and primarily the domains of narrative, subjective experience, and the production of meaning.

A general investigation into the larger cultural experiences and meanings must be complemented by a focus on particular individuals and how they use public beliefs and symbols to make sense out of experience and practices (Hollan & Wellenkemp 1994:7). However, data resulting from such a person-centered approach only becomes useful when grounded within the larger sociocultural context and everyday actions and lives of the respondents and community. The challenge lies in determining how this constellation of factors comes together to constitute lived experience, and how such experiences are made meaningful and articulated through discourse and the symbolic.

Within this integrative approach, I am wary of insights into the human experience that are strictly limited to phenomenological description, mental structures, or political-economic determinants. My own theoretical orientation is grounded in an interpretive, experience- and meaning-centered perspective that extends beyond the purely subjective to engage and interpret the larger sociocultural and politically relevant worlds. This integration of the micro and macro levels also necessitates an awareness of the greater contextual factors such as environmental, biological, and economic contributors. Although my approach is holistic, I am not under the illusion that it is possible to subsume all dimensions of a society into a single broad theoretical model. Rather, I find that moving between those paradigms that best articulate the subject matter is more practical. The following section examines my research approach in detail. I describe the specific methods used, ethical issues that arose, previous ethnographic work done in the region, and present contextual background on the region.

The Interpretive Tradition, Experience-Based Approaches, and Existential Anthropology

My methodological attention to metaphor, discourse, and practice, as garnered through on-going ethnographic interviews and participant observation, coalesced into an interpretive approach involving an existential, experience- and "event"-focused orientation. This approach was effective in my investigations of decision-making, management of misfortune, reproductive imperatives, family vulnerabilities, and choice in relation to cultural processes, social formations, and change.

My theoretical and methodological principles are influenced by Jackson's "ethnography of events," which seeks to explore the interplay of the public and private, and the personal reasons and impersonal causes in the constitution of events (Jackson 2005:xxv). This approach focuses on the critical moments or existential imperatives that define one's life or alters its course. This existentially-oriented approach permits the exploration of coexistence and human relationships to events, larger social structures, and ecological constraints as a dynamic interplay between limited possibilities and the capacity to generate meaning and construct one's sociocultural milieu. The approach reflects Sartre's suggestion that our humanness is a result of circumstances over which we have little control—for example, genetic predispositions and social history—and our capacity to live those circumstances in a variety of ways (in Jackson 2005:xi). Thus, this approach provides a method of looking at how one lives the relationship between the world in which he or she is born into and the world he or she has a hand in constructing (Jackson 2005, 1998).

An ethnography of events places importance within the social and ethical ramifications of the event, or its signification, and the emotions and expectations that the event arouses, rather than within strict explanations of the phenomena (Jackson 2005:xxvii). Specifically, meaning is found not in the events themselves, but in how an individual or family reacts to the event. Thus, the goal is not to essentialize or reduce experiences in a classical phenomenological sense, or to assign determinate and categorical meanings. Rather, following Jackson, I find significance in the process of exploring the intersubjective "tension" and "interplay" between modalities of experience, and the process of transforming lived experience into social meaning (2005, 1998).

I find that working from a person-centered or family-centered, phenomenologically-based existential orientation and a broader interpretive symbolic and discourse-oriented methodological approach is useful in understanding how lived experiences are made meaningful within the larger social context. Specifically, this permits the ethnographic gaze to move from lived experience to broader social meanings. I found that the analysis of symbolic meanings, as articulated by Turner (1967) and echoed and expanded upon by many other anthropologists (cf. West 2007), is useful for considering the spirit child phenomenon, as the symbols related to the spirit child are metaphors for larger social and cultural themes and concerns in Nankani society.

An interpretive symbolic approach that examines key metaphors, for example, is able to clarify, according to Fernandez, "an otherwise incomprehensible world" (Fernandez in West 2007:36). That is, for the local, the metaphor brings meaning to what may be incomprehensible. For the ethnographer, the analysis of the metaphor serves as an entrée into the understanding of the production of these meanings and the sociocultural world in which they dwell.

The symbols associated with the spirit child, from Turner's standpoint, should be studied in "relation to other events," or within their appropriate context of action, as symbols are closely involved in social processes (1967:20). In a more general sense, Geertz also emphasizes the importance of considering the larger context, remarking that culture itself is a "context' (1973:14). In my research, I found that this dialectical interplay between contextual relationships, the symbolic and metaphorical, interpersonal interactions, and "events" fit well with the general theoretical approach of Jackson's ethnography of events (2005) and his emphasis on the importance of examining intersubjectivity, or the relationship between things (1998).

My fieldwork necessitated an approach that considers the "multivocal" possibilities within my interpretation of the spirit child phenomenon (Turner 1967). This recognition necessitates an examination that moves beyond the strict representative function of metaphors, for example, to understand its broader implications and how metaphor is used in both discourse and practice. While I have found it conceptually useful to split the spirit child discourse and practice into two separate domains for analytical purposes, I feel that it is important to note that this split is for the most part artificial, since the Nankani do not make such a sharp analytical distinction. Accordingly, I attempt to reintegrate the two when presenting the Nankani sociocultural world.

Discourse—following Urban's perspective—is *about* and *within* the world, making culture possible (West 2007:59). Discourse is also central in the expression and creation of symbols and meanings (Sherzer & Urban 1986:1). Thus, an attention to the symbolic and metaphorical necessitated a focus on discursive practices and formulations, not in a morphological or grammatical sense, but in what people say in particular contexts and their meanings. Adopting this approach, particularly in my study of divination, I found that the multivocal symbols, metaphors, and the underlying discourse concerning the spirit child are not solely representational of people's experiences, but actually create, alter, enact, or otherwise influence the world (cf. West 2007).

While listening to stories and interviewing community members, I was not concerned with the "truth" of the discourse or of each individual narrative; I was interested in what each narrative did. Much as Jackson describes the basis for his research approaches, my attention was not necessarily focused on questioning the "epistemological status of beliefs" but on exploring their "existential uses and consequences." The "emphasis is thus shifted from what beliefs mean intrinsically to what they are made to mean" (Jackson 1996:6).

In regards to practice, I work from Ortner's (1984) basic conception of practice as not only "anything that people do" but also the implications of what they do, as viewed from a diachronic and processual frame of analysis. A "praxeological" approach, according to Devisch (1985), focuses on the purposeful articulation of meaning and how human *action* alters or creates meanings.

My final methodological approach includes attending to different forms of experiences. Last (1992) articulates an approach that recognizes the importance of extremes of experience as proving more significant for understanding a community's response to misfortune than normative or mundane experiences. Jackson also remarks that a focus on the mundane may miss "what is at stake" for individuals and their community, or the significant events that people strive to achieve or to avoid (2005). Additionally, simply focusing upon a specific variation of the problem under investigation has the potential to miss what is important, that is, the extremes experienced by individuals and the frequency of those extremes.

In regards to health interventions or policy determinations, research that seeks only to establish the average or baseline, a common objective in biomedical pursuits, is liable to miss what is significant for people; "thus health campaigns based on such interpretations are likely to be seriously flawed" (Last 1992:799). Even simple descriptions of a particular phenomena—for instance, a disabled infant and the circumstances surrounding its birth—are less important than understanding the fears provoked by the birth of the infant and the associated consequences the infant brings into the world. It is these beliefs and fears that people respond to that may disproportionately skew people's actions and ideas away from the norm (Last 1992:799). Additionally, it is these same fears that may incite people to achieve or maintain the norm. Indeed, the death of an infant, or what an outsider may categorize as an anomalous or extreme event, may be, to an insider, an event that simply happens "quite normally" whenever the appropriate precautions are not followed. Thus, anomalies of experience should not be perceived as chance encounters or ignored, as these very anomalies may motivate a larger set of practices and beliefs.

Relationships

This research would not have been possible without my strong collaborative relationships with AfriKids, a non-governmental organization (NGO), and the Navrongo Health Research Centre operated by the Ghanaian Ministry of Health. AfriKids is a locally managed grassroots child rights NGO with projects in Sirigu, Bolgatanga, and the Tallensi/Nabdam District. Working alongside local communities, AfriKids manages projects aimed at street children, child trafficking, and child labor. The organization supports an orphanage, a school, a medical center, and an information technology academy. In Sirigu, AfriKids operates projects addressing child neglect and maternal and children's health. My relationship with AfriKids was essential, since they were able to connect me with key community members, including families with spirit children. AfriKids was also able to ensure that my research was relevant and responsive to the community. This collaborative relationship allowed me to begin my research immediately and quickly connect with community members.

I also worked closely with the Navrongo Health Research Center as a visiting scholar. The NHRC has a long history of successful epidemiological and social science research projects in the KND, including the Navrongo Demographic Surveillance System (NDSS), a project that collects demographic and health data from 14,500 mapped domestic compounds on a quarterly schedule. Under the System, the 14,500 domestic compounds in the region are numbered and mapped for data collection and health care program delivery. Every three months, mobile field workers—along with 170 community key informants—visit compounds to assess births, deaths (including "verbal autopsies"), in- and out-migrations, education, marriages, pregnancies, and annual vaccination status. Health workers visit compounds more frequently if the family participates in one of NHRC's frequent field or clinical research studies. Residents therefore maintain frequent, on-going contact with health workers and researchers.

Two of my field assistants, Joe Asakibeem and Elijah Agongo, were AfriKids field/social workers. I accompanied them on their weekly rounds, community education campaigns, and family support programs. They helped translate and connected me with community members. Mathew Adagna, a local schoolteacher, was my primary field assistant and translator. I also received field supervision from the NHRC social science staff and Philip Adongo, Ph.D., a UNICEF researcher.

Fieldwork Details and Methodology

Pre-fieldwork planning and relationship building began in April 2005 and continued until I left for my fieldwork session in September 2006. During February 2006, I conducted pre-fieldwork visits at the Navrongo Health Research Centre and in Sirigu to establish relationships with AfriKids staff and local health researchers, and to learn more about the sociocultural context and regional issues. This feasibility work helped guide my methodology. I conducted my core fieldwork session from September 2006 through April 2007.

Funding was obtained from the University of Alberta Fund Supporting International Development Activities (FSIDA), Alberta Consular Corps International Scholarship, and the University of Alberta Department of Anthropology. My partner, Nicole Freydberg, was present for a portion of the fieldwork, working on a related side project that involved organizing and examining the demographic data concerning the spirit child. She received funding from the Population Council.

My primary residence was at the Navrongo Health Research Centre, which was also my logistical support base (i.e., on-site mechanic, internet, supplies, medical care, office support). I had a space within the AfriKids office in Sirigu and based all my fieldwork from there. Everyday I would work in Sirigu or surrounding communities in the eastern sub-district of the KND, and slept in Sirigu when necessary. I repaired an AfriKids truck in exchange for a year-long lease. Having reliable transportation proved essential to my ability to cover a wide area, respond to events, and be a part of various families' efforts to obtain health care—for example, driving them to the hospital. Having a truck also permitted me to interact with community members I might not normally have had a chance to visit, just by virtue of giving rides to people along my way. It also permitted me to cast a wide net that allowed me to interview and spend time with a variety of community members across a broader geographic area than if I was limited to distances travelable only by foot or bicycle.

My ethnographic fieldwork consisted of on-going, long-term and short-term interviews with individuals of all ages, planned and "unplanned" focus groups of a variety of sizes, and participant-observation of family activities, community social events, and numerous rituals. I collected standard ethnographic materials on a wide range of everyday behaviors and general themes related to child rearing, family life, social structure, taboos, history, myth, emotional expression, religious beliefs, and conceptions of deviance, illness, wellness, and healing. These general ethnographic interviews provided a foundation for more specific questions. This general ethnographic foundation proved essential in understanding the spirit child within the sociocultural context, as seemingly mundane topics frequently proved relevant, so much so that I quickly realized that the study and proper representation of the spirit child required a close understanding of Nankani social structure and culture. Finally, focusing on the general social and cultural themes allowed families to adjust to my presence and facilitated the development of rapport and eventually close friendships.

While every interaction within the community was "data," my more specific understandings of the culture and social structure came not only from my three assistants and friends, but from on-going, person-centered interviews with three elders within the community. At a minimum of once or twice a week I would stop by to visit with Asingiya, Asorigiya, or Ayanobasiya and their families. This person-centered ethnographic methodology, grounded within knowledge of everyday lives and processes (Hollan & Wellenkemp 1994), permitted me a better understanding of the culture and cultural practices as seen from the perspectives of these individuals within the community. I was able not only to explore questions about Nankani culture, but also to capture experience-near representations of the symbols or meanings under investigation, and to explore what is important to individuals within the larger cultural context (Hollan 2000). This approach favored my seeing subjects as active constructors of meaning rather than as passive recipients of cultural tradition (Hollan & Wellenkemp 1994). I used this person-centered approach with other key informants as well.

The person-centered approach was not appropriate for everyone. Many of my interviews consisted of semi-structured questions addressing specific topics, for example, spirit children or divination. I interviewed 14 concoction men, the ritual specialists involved in treating the spirit child, on many occasions. AfriKids organized a local "concoction man's association," or monthly meeting where the concoction men came together to discuss the spirit child practice and how they could make medical referrals if necessary. These monthly meetings were ideal settings in the style of focus groups that allowed me to observe and ask questions related to the spirit child. The meetings also provided me with an unequaled opportunity to observe the process of group formation, hierarchy, consensus-building, and decision-making at a group level.

I organized two separate reenactments of a complete spirit child ceremony, from preparation of the concoction and burial of the child, to the sacrifices and purification ritual. This ritual reenactment involved following all the procedures necessary to simulate the spirit child ceremony. It permitted analysis of the symbolic elements within the ritual and the observation of the preparation of the concoction for the spirit child. It clarified what exactly happened during the ceremony and was able to provide immeasurably more information than just asking the concoction men to describe what they do.

I interviewed seven diviners, some on multiple occasions, learning as much as I could about divining and divination and attempting to divine as much as possible. I also interviewed and conducted participant observation with numerous other community members, NGO workers, community health nurses, and Ghanaian and foreign health researchers. In partnership with AfriKids, I conducted community meetings with the local youth organization, diviners, women's group leaders, and district assembly members. We also took advantage of these larger meetings to hold breakout focus group meetings.

I worked at the maternal health clinic with the community health nurse on vaccination, education, weighing, and other preventative care tasks. While working at the clinic and becoming familiar with the mothers, I interviewed 21 mothers, focusing on their concerns about children's health and the spirit child phenomenon specifically. Due to my relationship with AfriKids, I became involved in various activities related to child-health in the eastern sub-district—from participating in health education activities to taking families to the hospital. This resulted in significant contact with families with sick children that were and were not spirit children. I was closely involved with several families with sick children and spent a great deal of time discussing and observing the challenges and decisions they faced. This type of on-going contact and general participant observation offered numerous insights.

I conducted most individual interviews at people's homes. Occasionally, other family members or neighbors—most often elders—would come to visit or to observe and join in the discussion when the interview was complete. Such occasions offered rich conversation and diverse perspectives. A meeting with one person would often turn into a larger discussion involving several family members.

I worked from a question book that contained questions pertaining to many topics and I used this book for both the short semi-structured interviews and on-going, person-centered interviews. Each general topic, such as *marriage*, would contain both general questions to spur the respondent to speak freely on the topic, and specific and direct questions. For example, a general question might ask, "What is a good marriage?" whereas as more direct question might ask, "What do you give as a bride price?"

Respondents were encouraged to speak freely on various topics, "teaching" what they felt was important for me to understand. Later, I would follow up with related questions and clarifications. Allowing the interview to flow in such a way permitted me to see how the respondent presented his or her statements and how the organization of these presentations could reveal patterns of both cultural and personal significance (Holland & Wellenkamp 1994). I found that the open-ended questions worked the best and were often more culturally appropriate since, as one assistant pointed out, "going direct" could cause the person to feel uncomfortable and result in an abrupt response.

I developed a portion of the question book in advance, but permitted room for growth, as new areas of interest frequently emerged. The question book thus developed over time and was instrumental in helping me maintain consistency between interviews and reminding me what areas I needed to address. Overall, I recorded over 100 interviews, focus groups, and other interactions.

I received basic language instruction from a local schoolteacher, and then worked closely with Mathew on language and translation projects. Most interviews were conducted in Nankana with the aid of an assistant/translator. My lack of strong language skills and the relative complexity of the interview topics required a double translation process. All interviews were translated twice, with the first translation occurring during the interview and the more definitive second translation being done later in the office. This ensured the accuracy and completeness of the field translation, allowed Mathew and me to work through complicated or unclear meanings, and permitted me to ask Mathew additional context-related questions when necessary. This second translation session was taxing for both Mathew and me, but proved important to the interpretive process.

Terminology

The Nankana dialects vary according to geographic location and, in the case of other written work, the author's preference. The Nankana terms and spelling preferences used in this dissertation are specific to the Sirigu area, reflecting the vocabulary and spellings that my assistants and the Sirigu community determined to be the most accurate. The linguistic diversity in the region is significant. For example, communities around Bolgatanga use *kinkirigo* to describe the spirit child, whereas Sirigu uses *sisigo*. For ease, I use the term "spirit child" throughout this text.

I place Nankana terms in italics on their first use and use roman type for their subsequent usage. When introducing a Nankana word for the first time, an English definition and explanation will follow. Appendix A is a glossary of Nankana terms used. I use the local terms when there is no direct translation of the Nankana word into English or in cases where the term and meanings are best preserved within the local language.

Within the text, I use the term *Euro-American*, rather than *Western*, as it is less geographically confined. I consider Euro-American to signify primarily a model or understanding of the world, i.e. worldview. It is a discourse, not a "people" or ethic identifier (Strathern 2005:163).

I also frequently refer to *traditional* families. I do not mean traditional as opposing modernity or being "anti-modern" or "non-modern" or "failing to embrace modernity" (Piot 1999:2). I recognize that the traditional, while grounded upon the past, is malleable and subject to interpretation and change in the present. I find that local definitions of whom or what is traditional is the most appropriate definition within this project. Within the Nankani context, a traditional person's world-view consist of beliefs, social structure, and practices that are grounded in what is locally perceived as being historical or continuous with what has come before. Community members characterize a traditional individual as a person living within the traditional family structure and practicing a traditional religion. A non-traditional person may be someone practicing Christianity or Islam, and someone who has received a formal education or embraced modernity and social change.

Finally, when I refer to the spirit child *phenomenon* I am referring to the entirety of events, practices, and discourse related to the spirit child. The spirit child phenomenon is broad. The spirit child *practice*, on the other hand, refers to the specific practices involved in the enactment of spirit child beliefs.

Permissions and Ethics

The University of Alberta Ethics Review Board and the Navrongo Health Research Centre granted ethical approval for the project. The NHRC also provided the necessary research clearance for visa-related approvals. The AfriKids NGO granted permission to work directly with that organization's staff. I obtained verbal permission to conduct this project from the Chief of Sirigu, the Sub-Chief for the Busongo section of Sirigu, the Chief of Kandiga, and the local district assembly members. These officials comprised the traditional and institutional leadership within the sub-district. I obtained informed consent from all participants. While I offered written versions of the consent forms, few could read these forms or sign their name. Consequently, oral consent was the primary means of obtaining consent. Before questions would begin, my assistant and I would describe the details of the project and their rights as participants. I asked the heads of families for permission when necessary (when children and junior family members were involved) and invited them to participate.

AfriKids staff members introduced me to the broader communities of Sirigu and Kandiga at numerous community functions and explained the purpose of my stay and project. Due to the NHRC's research and demographic projects, community members in the KND were familiar with research and informed consent procedures. I have used pseudonyms for all concoction men, spirit children, and their families but, with their approval, I have retained the names of AfriKids staff and several of my key informants.

As I suggested earlier, the representation of infanticide practices is a fundamental ethical concern to modern scholars. Because infanticide is central to this dissertation, it has been necessary to develop a representational paradigm that ensures not only the accuracy, but also the utmost appropriateness of representations. During the 2007 American Anthropological Association meeting, Seeman, while discussing the ethical issues within contemporary phenomenological methods, described how anthropologists need to pay greater attention to the "moral praxis" of those we work with. This process involves attending to the enactment of moral understandings or moral-worlds, and giving greater authority to our informant's accounts. Seeman claims that such attention will make it more difficult for others to extract information from ethnographic writing that they might use for purposes remote from the original authors' intentions (2007).

Working from his recommendation, I present a contextualized ethnographic interpretation of the spirit child that also accounts for and includes an emphasis placed on "moral lives" (cf. Kleinman 2006) and the moral imagination.

Finally, this project presented one central and pressing ethical question: What would I do if confronted with an imminent spirit child death? From the outset of this project, I hoped I would not encounter such a situation, but it was necessary that I prepare. I determined that if I should discover that a family was planning to kill a spirit child, I would inform AfriKids and let AfriKids manage the situation. I would not intervene beyond notifying AfriKids. In my work with spirit children, I was to make it explicit to families that I had no intention or capacity to adopt or care for the child. As it turned out, AfriKids had knowledge of all spirit children before me, and there was little opportunity for me to discover a spirit child independent of AfriKids.

Although the ethical advisors at the University of Alberta noted that they felt it was essential that I cooperate with any police or governmental investigations if they arose, the NHRC Institutional Review Board (IRB) argued that involving law enforcement or the government at any stage would be a violation of participant confidentially. They determined that the best option was for me to remain as a detached observer bound by confidentiality and to allow nature to take its course. The role of the police or government became a moot point after I discovered the police have other things to worry about and rarely become involved in investigations concerning a sick child's death. Although infanticide is illegal in Ghana, both community members and government officials told me that there is no way to prove if a particular death was intentional and, pragmatically, if it were intentional, what good would it do to imprison family members?

Formal Analysis

My theoretical position, as articulated above, established the framework of the analysis. All of my field notes and transcribed interviews were loaded into *Atlas.ti* qualitative analysis software. Atlas.ti was my primary platform where coding, linking, and analysis took place. While in the field and while translating and transcribing interviews, I noted emergent themes. Later these themes were developed into a coding system and used in Atlas.ti. While I developed many of my codes and analytic framework before the coding process, I recognized the emergence of new codes and included them in the coding scheme *in vivo*. A significant portion of my analysis was inductive, that is, my understandings and interpretations arose from the text and my experiences as a participant observer. I approached this from a holistic perspective that included examining the context in which key symbols and discourse was located. I also used a form of deductive analysis, developing questions for example that queried local perceptions of the origins of knowledge or the relationship between new knowledge and place.

Project Limitations

The most significant limiting factor was my gender. This limited my access to women community members because it was simply inappropriate for me as a male to participate in or witness certain parts of their lives. My outsider status was helpful in some respects, however, my field assistants were also male and I believe that gender affected women's responses during individual interviews, how they interacted with me—in formal and lighthearted exchanges—and how they talked about the spirit child or their lives in general. Looking back, I regret that I did not hire a female field assistant. I did find that women tended to express themselves more freely in larger group settings where they could come to a consensus on issues and express their opinions with little reservation as a group. Results obtained from interviewing groups of women differed from those obtained in individual interviews where several men—including the family head—were present and listening.

A second major limitation was my lack of comprehensive understanding of the language. Establishing proficiency in the local language to a point where I would be able to conduct interviews alone was not practical, and after investing a considerable amount of time studying the language I reached a cost-benefit decision much as Devereux (1993) describes: I could continue to work on the language or work on my research. I also recognized that within the limited amount of time and money I had available, I could not reach a level of fluent proficiency necessary to conduct the type of research I was doing. Facing this fact did not mean I stopped learning the language—learning a language is a data collection exercise in it own right (Devereux 1993:44). However, I became less obsessed with memorizing the minutia and more concerned with learning the meanings of things, and how to interact socially.

In the end, competent field assistants and the decision to subject all major interviews to a double translation process were to fill a crucial gap.

Background and Context

Regional, Linguistic, and Historical Context

My research was concentrated in the eastern sub-district of the Kassena-Nankana District (KND), one of 110 administrative districts in Ghana located in the Upper East Region, bordering Burkina Faso.[5] The focus of my research was in the villages of Sirigu, Mirigu, Nabongo, Yua, and Kandiga. Most of the time was spent in Sirigu and the surrounding sections. Sirigu has a population of roughly 5,000 people. I estimate the eastern sub-district to have at least 35,000 people. The primary ethnic group is the Nankani and the primary language in the eastern sub-district is Nankana. Directly to the west, the Kassena, who speak Kassem, are dominant. Kassem and Nankana are not mutually intelligible languages but the Kassena and Nankani are nonetheless socially and culturally similar, sharing common religious beliefs, marriage customs, and social structure.

Nankana is a dialect of Gurenne (or Grunsi), a broader term used to signify the language within the region. Outsiders refer to Gurenne as Frafra and use Frafra to broadly refer to the language throughout the area. Historically, the colonial powers and other ethnic groups living in southern Ghana used "Frafra" as a pejorative term—implying primitiveness, isolation, and backwardness. Individuals in the eastern sub-district identify as Nankana speakers, but not as Frafra speakers, which are used to describe those living around Bolgatanga and Bongo. Today, these names do not carry a negative connotation when used locally. Talni, a dialect of Gurenne, is spoken by the

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[5] While writing this (Feb 2008), the District was split into two separate districts, the KND and KND West. The Sirigu and Kandiga area are still part of the original KND.

Tallensi, who live near the town of Tongo. Dialects vary strongly by clan and locality, quickly changing as one travels even a few miles in any direction.

The KND encompasses 1,674 square kilometers of sub-Sahelian guinea savannah, a semi-arid scrubland with limited and widely spaced trees and shrubs, resembling the topography more to the north of Ghana than of the rainforests to the south (Mensch, et al. 1998). The same comparison might be said of the cultural characteristics of this region, since the people living in the district are more culturally akin to those living to the north, in Burkina Faso. Early migration evidence and oral histories offer support that many of the ethnic groups in the Upper East Region originally migrated from regions to the north.

The Mossi kingdom historically dominated the West African Sudanic zone, and the dynamics of conquest and migration varied according to specific region (Allman & Parker 2005:25). Several of my key informants describe how a common ancestor moved down from the community of Zecco in Burkina Faso. Asingiya describes how their founding ancestor, or head of the maximum lineage, came to settle and found the village of Sirigu. Asingiya's account:

> Atalmiro was crossing from the Burkina side searching for food with some others. Back then, they would go into the forest looking for certain things. As he was traveling, he had something like a boil on his leg, maybe a guinea worm. Altalmiro had difficulty walking and couldn't keep up with the group. He stopped to rest under a shea tree. An animal called a *shia*, its claws are very long, I don't think it lives here anymore, came and sat on his leg. When it settled on his leg, it opened the sore and all those things inside his leg crawled out. After that he was okay again. Because the tail of the *shia* was very white, he followed it to water, drank, and returned to the tree. It was then a woman saw him, and asked why he was there. The woman was able to boil some water and treat his leg. From there, Atalmiro had intercourse with her and married her. He gave birth to four sons, one of which was Azuko. The people of Sirigu trace themselves to him, as Azuko gave birth to Asirigu who traveled here to this place.

Asorigiya, during a separate interview, continues this account:

> Our ancestor, Asirigu, left Azuko and settled here because the family gave birth to many sons and they were all marrying and having children. Because there were so many, they had to leave the house to get other land to farm. At that time, the whole place was forest, bush, so he left his home to come and settle here. The eldest of the clan lives at that place. The elder's house is always there.

Most individuals can trace their "fathers" by name back to the founding ancestor of their maximal lineage. The kinship system, based upon the unbroken continuity of patrilineal descent, is the foundation of all social, cultural, and religious dimensions of the Nankani people. Lineage and clan leadership is primarily determined by age and authenticity, that is, the elders within families who are able to trace direct decent to the founding ancestor have the greatest jural authority.

The family *tindana*, or "master of the earth,"—a family landlord—regulates land use. Individuals do not own land. Rather, family lineages are responsible for the care and distribution of land for farming and building purposes. Any male family member has the ancestral right to request a parcel of farmland.

The primary occupation in the district is subsistence farming (90%) and livestock rearing (Tonah 1994). Even individuals with full-time jobs, teachers for example, maintain farms and rely upon food produced from those farms in addition to goods purchased in the market. Common crops include early and late forms of millet, sorghum, and groundnuts. Livestock such as goats, sheep, cattle, and fowls are primarily used for social, religious, and market exchange purposes. For example, larger animals are exchanged for bride price payments, religious sacrifices, or in the market place to earn cash for medical treatment. In addition to working on the larger family plots, women will also maintain small gardens, cultivating okra and various greens and vegetables used primarily for stews.

Agriculture is limited to the one annual rainy season, averaging 33 inches of precipitation from the months of May through October. The remaining part of the year is very dry, hot and subject to Harmattan[6] winds and dust. Due to the dependence on a single growing season, food insecurity, periods of famine, and seasonal malnutrition are a persistent threat (Mensch, et al.1999, Binka, et al. 1995).

Limited irrigation permits the sale of some cash crops, such as tomatoes, but poor soil quality and difficult weather conditions make farming difficult. Farmers rely mainly on rain-fed irrigation, and less than 1 percent of subsistence farmers have access to modern farming machinery and irrigation (Adongo, et al. 1997). Local dam projects have increased the number of irrigatable acres; however, the overall benefit of these projects is debatable due to increased disease burden, the cost of accessing the water, and the need for fertilizer. The most frequently cultivated dry season crops include tomatoes, rice, and onions.

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[6] The Harmattan wind is a dry and dusty wind that blows from the Sahara during the dry season. When severe, the resulting fog-like haze blocks the sun and limits visibility.

The transportation of crops and other goods between markets or urban areas are through privately owned trucks. Traveling by foot and bicycle is the most common mode of transportation within and outside of the district. Small motorbikes are becoming more common. Taxis or small buses provide transportation between the district capitals and major markets. Larger buses link the district capitals with urban areas in the south. In rural areas, finding affordable and fast transportation is difficult. Transportation issues become paramount during medical emergencies. The decision to take a family member to the hospital, which is some cases is a life-or-death decision, is dictated largely by the cost and hardship it imposes upon the family or the reality that there is no money to send someone to the hospital or clinic.

Approximately 50 percent of the population has not attended school. However, school enrollment rates are rising since the Ghanaian government instituted free education in 2006. Despite the elimination of fees, school is not entirely free. Students must still come up with the equivalent of $26 per year to pay for a uniform, bag, books, pens, and other supplies.[7] Many parents are unable to afford these fees, which are the equivalent of over ten fowls or close to the price of an adult goat ($35). Often, children will work in the market assisting shopkeepers or food vendors to earn enough to attend. Due to the costs involved, parents will often send only the children they believe have the potential to succeed in school and "make something of themselves." Families perceive sending a child to school as an opportunity for not only the child, but also the larger family, as a successful child is obligated to support his or her family. School attendance among girls is improving.

Historically, parents did not send their best and brightest or most promising children to school. Those sent to school were the troublemakers, the lazy or "bad" children. An elder explained that the loss of an unreliable child to a school located in a village or city would have a minimal impact on the family even if the child never returned home, which was often the case. "Why send away our best children," Ayanobasiya explained, "when we needed and wanted to keep them at home to work on the farm?" One man described, with laughter and a tinge of pride, how the colonial educators believed that all Nankani children were miscreants and poorly behaved because they only had contact with the bad ones. He claimed that it took the government administrators a long time to figure out why.

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[7] Quoted dollar figures are both US and Canadian amounts, since at the time of writing exchange rates were close to equal.

Talking About the Weather

The old adage that advises, when there is nothing else to talk about, to talk about the weather, certainly applied in Sirigu, where discussions about the weather and the seasons usually resulted in interesting conversation and good ethnographic insights. I would frequently bring up the characteristics, benefits, and difficulties associated with each season. Fascinating debates concerning seasonal preference ensued.

I declared myself to favor the dry season and boldly proclaimed it to be vastly superior to the wet, despite the high temperatures that averaged above 40 Celsius (104 F). I argued that the lack of humidity, fewer winged pests and the diseases they carry, better road conditions, and the fact that beyond repairing or building new rooms, one had little work to do, were among its better qualities. Moreover, all the festivals, funerals, and social events occur during the dry season.

Nearly everyone disagreed with me. Community members tended to prefer the rainy season, with its humidity and cooler temperatures, averaging 30 Celsius (86 F). However, there were other more important reasons for this preference. Asingiya discussed how the ecological differences between the savanna and America affected how people develop. "We have a long dry season," he explained, "and you people, all the time, are experiencing a rainy season. It means that at your place you are able to care for your children very well." Building on an earlier conversation we had about the similarities between "black" people and "white" people, he remarks that, "We are all the same, we have the same blood. We are all supposed to be grown by 21 years of age, however, when you people are 18 years-old, you are grown. It's because your food, the weather at your place, and the rain is not as it is here. The Harmattan does not get you. After the rainy season here, the whole time is very hot. It's because of that, that our growth is different from the way you grow."

I found Asingiya's analogy between the seasons and human growth interesting. It made sense. He understood human development to be dependent on ecological conditions just as plant development is. The tremendous emergence of life during the wet season and the general physical and emotional discomfort experienced during the dry season reinforces this embodied knowledge and experience. The onset of the dry season brings about many significant concerns. The shift between seasons is rather abrupt. Within the first few weeks of its onset, the leaves begin to fall from the baobab, the earth browns, and upper respiratory infections become more common. Local understandings attribute the increase in sickness to the dry air, cool mornings, and Harmattan winds, which are believed to carry sickness. Later in the season, as the temperature climbs, meningitis becomes a concern, as do the dwindling food supplies saved and rationed from the previous harvest. Community members more commonly refer to the dry season as the "famine season."

I soon realized that my preference for the dry season was primarily due to my desire for comfort and being in the position of having food security and other supplies. I was not dependent upon or concerned about crops or stretching a limited food supply. During the dry season, families eagerly await the rains and the opportunity to "get seed in the ground." Although I enjoyed the lazy dry season afternoons sitting in the shade and chatting with community members, locals on the other hand were concerned with more pressing issues: Will my food last? Will the rains be enough this year? Many men looked forward to farming, indicating that it was better to work the land and take an active role in producing a successful harvest than to sit and wait. "When you are working," I was told, "you will know that you will soon have some food." Thus, the lack of influence or control over one's farm during the dry season and waiting while one's farm sat unproducing are concerns that, in part, shape one's interpretation and experience of the seasons.

Of Politics and Slavery

The Nankani are described as having an acephalous political organization, meaning that the colonial powers were unable to identify a recognizable paramount chief. This does not mean that the Nankani lacked any centralized organization during pre-colonial times. Decision-making and leadership was invested within the kinship structure and clan elders. During the colonial period, the British system of indirect rule, or the appointment of chiefs reporting directly to colonial officers, changed the political and power dynamic in what, at the time, was called the Northern Territories of Ghana. Currently, a democratic system is in place throughout Ghana, but the "traditional" chieftaincy system remains and is recognized for its role in dispute resolution, local decision-making, and for its symbolic purposes. Among the Nankani, clan elders still maintain a significant amount of control and power, though it is limited to their specific clan.

Historically, significant political influence—of the state systems such as the Ashanti, Mossi, and the colonial presence that surrounded the non-centralized societies of the Volta Basin such as the Tallensi and Nankani—was minimal due to their uncentralized political structure, dispersed localities, and the physical geography. By virtue of their frontier status and the fact that the Nankani were not directly controlled by any neighbors, they were subject to frequent predation, violence, and particularly slavery, which sustained the surrounding militarized states economically both before and during the colonial period (Allman & Parker 2005:28).

The Ashanti would often travel to the north to capture slaves to use for tribute and in exchange for money or goods. The Ashanti were not alone: slave raiders coming from other parts of West Africa, particularly from the northern states, were also involved in preying upon the Nankani and their neighbors. Oral accounts describe how neighboring clans and ethnic groups could also capture a person traveling through their territory and sell them to slavers.

Slave raiding took a significant toll on the Nankani people, however, they were often successful, as Allman and Parker also note, in defending themselves from raiders (2005:29). Among other stories, I recorded accounts of how local communities fought back or tricked the better-equipped and mounted slave raiders. I present Asorigiya's account of an incident where Azuko's family was able to drive off the Ashanti slave raiders.

> When the Ashanti were here, they were fighting and enslaving us. They came with horses and guns. One time, when they got to Zecco, our ancestral land, we were able to devise a means to retaliate, and they retreated. Because the Ashanti were all over fighting us, there was a chief named Akarifu who went and consulted the gods of the land. The gods told him to bring a white goat, a white fowl, a white dog, some pito [local beer] and asked all the others to contribute a fowl each. They all gathered in a spot with shade and roasted them. They also gathered the plant called *kenkansiga*, when it touches your body you will be itching. They took that and put it inside the pito they had brought, so when you drink the pito, you will be bush and drowsy.
>
> Akarifu placed all these things out and asked the people if they were ready for war, as by then the Ashanti were advancing on them. The people were ready to fight. Everyone hid, some went to the left, and some went to the right. They arranged the meat and the pito in the shade. The Ashanti's saw that the people had left their meat and pito, and thought the they must have just seen them coming, so they stopped to eat and drink, and gave some of the pito to their horses. After that, they all became bush. Then, the Azuko people came out of hiding and chased them. The Ashanti ran, but the Azuko people drove them towards a big river nearby. When they got to the river with their horses, the horses jumped in, but it was too deep and most of them died. That was how they were able to capture the Ashanti. There was no more fighting after that.

I asked several people if they maintained any animosity toward the Ashanti for the role that they played in raiding and capturing the Nankani people. All remarked that they did not. "In Ghana we are all one people now," said a young man. I found it interesting that others described how the white man was perceived as responsible for putting a stop to such slave raiding and establishing peace in the region. From the perspective of local elders, the arrival of the British colonial presence reduced the number and scale of group conflicts, and was perceived as bringing a degree of stability and safety to the region. Before the colonial presence in the North, elders described how it was quite dangerous to travel freely outside of one's village, as one could be easily captured or killed.

Although most accounts of slavery in West Africa involve violent abduction, a lesser-known variety of slavery occurred that was equally as traumatic. During times of famine or extreme need, families were forced to make the difficult decision to sell one of their children to a Mossi or Ashanti person in exchange for grain that would sustain the other family members until the next harvest. An informant described that even during his father's time (around 1910 to the early 1920s) families would have to search for a particular type of grass during the middle of the dry season to eat. The grass was difficult to prepare, as families had to boil it multiple times for it to become palatable. "These days we don't eat those grasses anymore," he explained, "but then you had to go out to get them or you would have nothing to eat. That is also the time that they would start selling their children in return for food."

Other informants explained how traders and slavers would travel into the region during the dry season or times of famine and offer to buy children in exchange for food. Asingiya explains how it worked:

> It was very difficult to get food in those days. You see, if you give birth to so many children and you are not able to provide for them, you don't have the food to feed them, you can give one of your children to a person who has food, for millet and salt, so you will be able to provide for the rest. It's simple—if you don't do that, the others will die. It was a painful act to do that, to give one of your children away, but what could you do? If you don't do that, all of you will die. You won't get food from anywhere.
>
> So, the Mossi from Burkina Faso would come. They always came with millet, and they would stay around a particular house. The people who need to sell their children, they will take their children there and collect the millet. When we think of slavery, we think of the two types of slavery: first, people were coming to take us, and second, we were selling ourselves.

Like the accounts of resisting and fighting slavers, there are also inspiring stories of children escaping after being sold. Asorigiya, while discussing the accounts and impact of slavery, recounted the following story:

> In those days, there was one Mossi man that came to buy people. When he came, one son named Alagiba offered to sell himself for his family, because he knew that his father was suffering. His father loved him and didn't want to sell them. So, his sons devised a plan that they should sell him to the Mossi man, but he would run back to the house a few days later. The Mossi man bought Alagiba, and knowing that he had come willingly, did not worry that he would run away. While they were traveling, Alagiba said that he needed to go to the bush to relieve himself.

> When he was out of eyesight, Alagiba ran back to the house. Because the Mossi man was holding the other slaves he had bought, he could not go and search for Alagiba or they would all run as well. So, he delivered the slaves, gathered more grain to sell, and traveled back down to Sirigu to buy more people.
>
> Before entering Sirigu, he went to Alagiba's house and told the father that Alagiba had run away, and asked if he had returned. The father responded that he sold his child, that he was not there, and began profusely thanking the Mossi man for coming back to tell him that his son had died. 'That is why you are coming back,' the father said crying, 'To tell me my son has passed.' The Mossi man was still suspicious. The father, emphasizing that his son had not returned and must be dead, called all his sons for the Mossi man to examine. Alagiba, who had returned, had received many tribal marks on his face and changed his name to Akabire. The family hoped that he would not be recognized. The Mossi man looked at all his sons, but could not identify Alagiba and gave up. The father thanked the Mossi man, and said that he was a good person for coming to tell him that his son had died, which was the correct thing to do. The Mossi man went away, unable to do anything.

While slavery is most often associated with the transatlantic slave trade, few recognize the persistence of forced labor during the British colonial period. While discussing slavery, an elder remarked that during the Second World War "the whites" came and "caught" (used to describe enslavement) people to fight for them. Allman and Parker also offer historical evidence discussing a World War I "recruitment drive" where locals had to be "hunted down and captured" and forced to serve in the war (2005:89). Labor for British colonial projects such as road building was forced and unpaid. Those that refused were threatened, arrested, and beaten.

The trafficking of humans has played a significant role in the history of the Upper East Region of Ghana and remains a contemporary issue. Individuals and families, lured by seemingly greener pastures, migrate to the southern sector of Ghana in search of low-paying and often-hazardous jobs. NGOs and the media report that young children are still being sold to fishermen and miners who frequently prey upon poor families, promising them on-going monetary payments and security in exchange for the child. Such reports force us to rethink our present assumptions about child labor and children's rights, particularly in areas where poverty is rampant and options for families are limited. An essential starting point for this rethinking might be an examination of the history and local understandings of the moral dimensions of such decisions and the notions of childhood in the local context, rather than the immediate assumption that such decisions are a result of morally defective families.

Imagining the North

The KND remains extremely rural, remote, and isolated from the rest of Ghana. It is 1000km north of the nation's capital Accra, located in the south (more than 14 hours by car and 18 hours by public bus). Ouagadougou, the capital of neighboring Burkina Faso, lies about 175 km to the north. The physical remoteness, cultural, and ecological differences emphasize the economic and politically marginal status of the northern regions of Ghana. Unlike the cocoa farms and gold mines in the southern sectors, northern Ghana has little in the way of large cash crops or industry. Historically it has always been "mined" for its greatest resource: people.

The lack of economic development in the North combined with seasonal agriculture patterns and population increase, results in migration to the South (Adongo, et al. 1997, Tonah 1994). Presently, wage-labor migration to the South, particularly during the dry season, is a source of family income, although workers often find that they are unable to support themselves and their families. In some cases, men are unable to return home to farm, leaving their families destitute.

Current aid and development funding is sporadic and in the past two years significantly more money has been channeled to the southern sectors of the country. While in Bolgatanga, the regional capital of the Upper East, I witnessed youth protesting about the unequal distribution of aid and development funding between the north and south of the country. The program managers I spoke with in the South explained that more people could be more efficiently helped when funds are directed to programs in southern Ghana. However, my sense is that the differential in funding is more likely due to political factors and an incomplete understanding of the additional geographic and economic challenges facing projects in northern Ghana.

During my research, the north-south or forest-savanna political-economic distinctions were immediately apparent. I became increasingly interested in how locals and foreigners perceived the region that Rattray (1932) described as *The Tribes of the*

Ashanti Hinterland, an early colonial ethnographic report whose title happens to reflect both the colonial and post-colonial attitudes toward the north.

Historically, northern Ghana has lived within the shadow of the south and the Ashanti people, an ethnic group that has long received greater attention due to recognition by early colonial powers of the Ashanti's state-oriented political structure, which Europeans equated with civilization, the strength of their pre-colonial kingdom, their access to natural resources, and their direct contact and relationships with Europeans. Early European accounts of Ghana made sharp distinctions between the dispersed, stateless societies in the north and the centralized kingdoms in the south (Allman & Parker 2005:27). The colonial perspective saw in the North a stereotype of primitive isolation that persists today.

While in the urban areas of southern Ghana I was frequently subject to questions about why I was living in the North. No sane person would *choose* to live there, southerners told me. The discourse concerning the North revealed a great deal about people's assumptions, and the north-south dichotomy. One such typical exchange happened in a taxi in Accra during the final days of my fieldwork.

"Where are you from?" asked the driver.

"I'm from America, but I live up in the north near Navrongo." I replied.

"Ahh!" he responds, "The North! How do you do it? What do you eat?"

"Oh, it's a wonderful place," I reply, evading his question. "It's very quiet. I like it better than Accra. Have you been there?"

"Oh no, no," he said.

"Why not?" I ask. "You should visit sometime."

"No, no, I can't. If I did, I would surely die."

Perceptions of the North typically go deeper than simple notions of isolation or backwardness. Allman and Parker, discussing the lesser-known dimensions of this commonly accepted stereotype, found that northern savanna people are also viewed with a degree of ambivalence, since their cultural and "ecological otherness" is recognized as a powerful source of ritual power (2005:127). For example, Allman and Parker (2005) describe how the Tallensi's Tongnaab shrine was imported to the South for its perceived powers as a successful witchcraft detection and healing shrine. Bannerman-Richter (1987) provides several other examples of the spiritual powers that come from the North in his quasi-fictional account that describes the mysterious "little people," or powerful beings originating from northern Ghana that have the ability to grant people's wishes. He also describes a type of deity or fetish used in the south that originally came from the North. "The spirits inhabiting these objects," Bannerman-Richter explains, "are Northerners, so they may often communicate in the language of Mossi … or dress in a northern fashion" (1987:73, 94). Finally, Bannerman-Richter describes a journey he undertook to the North to find and speak with specialists, indicating that, "If I really wanted to know more about the supernatural entities which were pivotal in traditional African religions, northern Ghana was a treasure-house for such information" (1987:94).

Allman and Parker explain that during colonial times a degree of "ritual potency" associated with the liminal frontier zones was "mapped onto the arbitrary boundaries created just a few decades before by colonial conquest" (2005:137).

> The Gurunsi, Frafra, and others were generally regarded as primitive barbarians, who as slaves or subsequently as migrant wage laborers were fit only to perform the most menial of tasks. On the other hand, these uncivilized aliens possessed the esoteric knowledge to access a range of deities that could combat witchcraft, the greatest single threat to the civilized order. The ambiguity of ethnic otherness therefore intersected with a further ambivalence, that of the historical battle against witchcraft (Allman & Parker 2005:141).

The North, because of its marginal and ambiguous status, can be "good to think" (Levi-Strauss 1963:89), a place where the moral imagination can be exercised, where possibilities and solutions are envisioned. It is a place unknown to many Ghanaians. It is an imaginary space (Sartre 1940), and in this unfamiliarity or mystery lies the source of its power.

Previous Anthropological Work in the Region

Captain R. S. Rattray, the colonial anthropologist for the Anthropological Department of the Gold Coast Government, conducted the first ethnographic work in the Northern Territories of Ghana in 1928. The British colonial government commissioned Rattray to study the "stateless" people of the North to facilitate control of the region

(Allman & Parker 2005:73). Rattray's work culminated in the two volume series, *The Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*. Rattray worked closely with the "Nankanse" and published a wide variety of useful ethnographic information including history, clan organization, leadership, and social and cultural norms and practices (Rattray 1932).

Fortes followed Rattray, originally wanting to work with the Nankani due to the convenient proximity of the colonial administration rest house and Rattray's previous work. However, he ended up studying the Tallensi for two years between 1934 and 1937. Fortes, a structural-functionalist, was noted for his work on Tallensi kinship and social structure, concepts of the person, and political systems. The close examination of Fortes' work was central to my interpretive process and useful in establishing a historical understanding of the local sociocultural milieux as Fortes interpreted it 70 years earlier.

Fortes remarked that there are no real linguistic, cultural, political, or structural boundaries between the Tallensi and Nankani, since "they overlap in every way" (1945:16). This statement is true in some respects, but also a reflection of Fortes' tendency to assume homogeneity across time and space, the isolation of groups, and the theoretical trend directing attention to unifying themes rather than specific differences between groups. I asked several Nankani if they regard themselves as similar to the Tallensi. Respondents would reply that there are many similarities, such as parts of the language and social and religious structure, but the Nankani are not Tallensi and they would hesitate to say that they overlapped in all ways. While there are many structural, religious, and linguistic overlaps that are worthy of comparison, there are also differences that make the Nankani a distinct cultural group. Thus, when making comparisons with the Tallensi, Fortes' work, or other anthropological work throughout the Upper East Region, I attempt to qualify and contextualize my comparisons.

Other anthropologists who have worked in bordering regions include Jack Goody and Ester Goody, who worked with groups to the south of the KND (1962), and Eugene Mendonsa (1982) and Bruce Grindal (1983), who worked with the Sisala to the west. Steve Tonah studied Fulani herdsman along the Ghana-Burkina Faso border (1994). Ann Cassiman studied women's places and the cultural construction of home places with the Kassena (2006). Allison Howell, a missionary anthropologist, worked with Kassena and briefly addresses the spirit child practice in her work (1997). Allman and Parker, both historians, produced an informative historical and ethnographic work concerning the Tallensi and the Tongnaab shrine, illustrating how the history and meanings of the shrine and traditional religious practices highlight the relationships between modernity, social and economic change, and traditional beliefs (2005). Within Sirigu specifically, Irit Eguavoen, a German anthropologist, studied water needs, rights, and practices in 2004. In the late 1970s, Robert Tripp worked in Sirigu on economic and farm strategies, and nutritional status and determinants of community members.

Researchers from the Navrongo Health Research Centre have a consistent presence within the district. Community health focused social scientists such as Philip Adongo, Jim Phillips, Patricia Akweongo, and Cornelius Debpuur have conducted important studies concerning traditional family structure and reproduction, FGC, reproductive health, and community knowledge of malaria and its prevention.

Health Context

> When making empirical comparisons of living standard, the temptation to use such aggregate commodity-based measures as the GNP or the GDP is strong, partly because these measures seem nicely aggregated and conveniently complete. Everything, it may appear, counts in the GNP. The question, of course, is: everything in what space? Commodities, typically yes; functionings and living conditions, possibly not at all (Sen 1987:33).

This section highlights the health-related issues facing families within the Kassena-Nankana District. Although I offer a great deal of statistical and demographic evidence, I recognize that these numbers alone cannot illustrate the full range of uncertainties, experiences, or responses. This dissertation is, in fact, an effort to help paint a more complete picture of how people experience the demographic variables that are persistently monitored as a sign of health and development in the district. Although limited, health statistics and demographic values are useful in that they show us the misfortunes and the broader uncertainties that people attempt to control or manage in their lives (Jankowiak 2007). I view epidemiological variables as providing a starting point from which to develop understandings of how these statistical odds are locally experienced and interpreted.

This section addresses the health and mortality statistics, and health care options available across the region, help-seeking strategies, barriers to health care, and a case study of help-seeking behavior. Before discussing the specific health characteristics and statistics, I describe what health means for the Nankani residents.

When describing what health means, residents would state that the obvious lack of sickness is a good indicator of health. One man remarked that health is, "When a fellow is not complaining of any stomach aches, headaches, or any sickness for a long time, and that person has not grown lean." Locals also describe and understand health in social terms, as other scholars working throughout Africa note.

Norbert, a community health nurse, remarked that health could only be achieved when there is peace in the family. "If there is no peace in the family," Norbert stated, "health will never be promoted. So the family members must have peace, they must have love for one another. If you don't have love for me and if something is troubling me, you won't care. So, peace and harmony, it will all contribute to bringing health into a family."

An elder remarked that, "When you talk of a healthy person, he is someone who is always happy, not mean to others, and with nothing to worry about. Everything is available in abundance. That is a healthy person."

Euro-American understandings and measures of health take a much different form, namely the monitoring of child and maternal mortality rates and vaccination coverage. I now turn to these measures.

Epidemiological Measures of Health

Childhood within the Upper East Region is a precarious time, both in terms of encountering illness and the presence of spiritual dangers. The challenges facing childhood begin long before birth, as political-economic constraints, maternal difficulties, malnutrition, inadequate pre-natal care, and delivery complications place the fetus and infant at risk. Demographically, the under 5-years child mortality rate is a key indicator for overall child health and is used as a larger indicator for development in regions. In industrialized parts of the world, the under 5-year mortality average is six deaths per 1,000 births. Globally, the average is 72 per 1,000 (WHO 2006). World Health Organization data indicates that sub-Saharan Africa bears the most significant child mortality burden, with the highest rates in the Democratic Republic of the Congo at 532 deaths per 1,000 births.

Ghana's national average for child mortality is 111 deaths per 1,000 births. Recently, the Kassena-Nankana District has seen significant improvements in child and maternal health, with child mortality dropping below the national average with 82.9 deaths per 1,000 births, an improvement of 43 percent over the 1994-1995 data. Infant mortality in the KND has also improved 34 percent in the past decade with 82.9 deaths per 1,000 births, although it is still higher than the national infant mortality rate of 64 deaths per 1,000 births (Binka, et al. 2007, Phillips, et al. 2005). Neonatal mortality (under 28 days) continues to decline, with rates decreasing from 40.9 per 1,000 births in 1995, to 20.5 in 2002 (Baiden 2006). For historical comparison, a 1919 estimate for the Northern Territories of Ghana showed that only 33 percent of children reaching five years of age lived until they were ten (Howell 1997:80).

Life expectancy at birth in the KND is 52.6 years of age. These improvements in infant and child mortality are attributed to the Ministry of Health and Navrongo Health Research Centre's successful health interventions, education programs, and the expansion of community health nurses into rural areas (Binka, et al. 2007).

From a local perspective, Ayanobasiya remarks that the health of the people in recent years has improved significantly.

> People no longer die as they used to die in the olden days. With children, we were afraid of measles attacking them. Measles can come and easily kill them or if it does not kill it will cause blindness. So, as you see blind people these days, the children today will not be like that. Because of the vaccinations and health facilities, when people are sick they go there and get medicine and antenatal care.

Despite the improvements in mortality, vaccination coverage rates in the district remain below the 90 percent target rate set by UNICEF, from between 72 percent for *bacillus calmette-guérin* to 45 percent for measles (Nyarko, et al. 2001). Child deaths reflect this deficiency. A Population Council report notes that two-thirds of all deaths among children under 5 years are attributable to preventable causes: tetanus, typhoid fever, measles, malaria, diarrheal diseases, and acute respiratory infections (pertussis, pneumonia) (Gouede 2001), "often acting in synergy with malnutrition" (Pence, et al 2001).

Population health researchers use maternal mortality figures to assess the quality of health care systems, the status of women and children, and the economic and sociocultural environment. As with child mortality, sub-Saharan Africa bears the burden of maternal deaths. The world average is 400 deaths per 100,000 live births. Sub-Saharan Africa averages 900 deaths per 100,000, with Sierra Leone suffering the highest burden at 2,100 deaths per 100,000 births (WHO 2005). This may be compared to Canada's seven deaths per 100,000 ratio. Improving significantly over the past 10 years, the KND's average is 373, compared to Ghana's national average of 560 (Mills, et al. 2007). Contributing factors to maternal mortality include disease during pregnancy (Allotey 1995), delays in health care seeking among pregnant women (Binka, et al. 1995), and the lack of adequate health facilities for handling obstetrics (Dollimore, et al. 1993).

Recently, the total fertility rate decreased over the past decade from 5.3 children per woman of reproductive age to 4.1 (Nyarko, et al. 2002, Binka, et al. 1999). However, this reflects only surviving children, not the total number of births each woman has had, since several middle aged and older women I met had at least one birth that did not survive. Finally, it is also important to recognize that the maternal and child mortality data is district-wide and includes the peri-urban area of Navrongo and the immediately surrounding communities where, due to easier access, mortality rates are much lower than the more rural areas of the district such as the eastern sub-district where this fieldwork took place.

Formal biomedical health care options include the district's Navrongo War Memorial Hospital, which lies about three kilometers outside of Navrongo Town, and several smaller community health stations staffed by community health nurses. Ghana Health Service provides primary health care at these satellite clinics, as well as outreach services throughout the district, with teams of nurses on motorbikes divided among the communities. This community health care model is effective and a recent study indicated that it was instrumental in reducing child mortality (Pence, et al. 2007). Bolgatanga has a larger regional hospital. Most surgical procedures are conducted in the urban hospitals of Accra and Kumasi.

Local Modes of Healing

During my fieldwork, I found that many residents engaged a pluralistic medical system that encompasses a wide range of traditional healers and community health nurses. Decisions on who to visit depends on the type of illness, its seriousness, and the recommendations from family or friends. It is common for a person to draw from or simultaneously use multiple healing strategies. For example, a person may visit a diviner to determine the cause of the illness and offer the necessary sacrifices to his ancestor, while also visiting a herbalist and the community health clinic for medications—sometimes all in the same day.

Joe was in a motorcycle accident and went to hospital to make sure his ankle was not broken. He was given an anti-inflammatory. After returning home, he immediately applied a herbal preparation to his ankle and continued to take the anti-inflammatory, but remarked that the herbs were what would make it heal faster. The swelling and bruising quickly went away. Joe attributed his rapid recovery to the ability of the herbs to draw out the swelling.

Biomedical explanatory models and healing methods have not replaced traditional models and modes of healing. Individuals with some education or exposure to health education campaigns are most likely to combine or integrate healing models.

Family members have a clear idea of what biomedical or traditional health choices are the best for particular conditions. For example, I questioned the effectiveness of the local herbal preparation applied to a woman's badly infected finger and purchased an antibiotic prescribed to treat the infection. After the full ten-day course of medication, the finger was still badly infected. Family members emphasized that their local treatment was better for this sort of thing and proceeded to treat her nearly gangrenous finger with a combination of local herbs. Within a week, the swelling and the infection had gone.

A family's financial resources strongly influence their help-seeking choices and remain the most significant barrier to accessing biomedical care. Not only is attending a clinic costly, but arranging transportation to the hospital is expensive. In many cases, traditional healers work on a "trust as insurance" model, where individuals without the means to pay are not refused services, but are trusted that if the treatment works they will return in good time with the payment. The Ghana Health Service recently initiated the National Health Insurance Scheme, which provides health insurance for individuals and families for a yearly fee. Unfortunately, many families living in rural areas and with limited access to cash resources cannot afford the health insurance fee, which does not include drug coverage. The Ministry of Health provides free maternal and infant health clinics, which include education and vaccinations. Community health nurses will often provide care and some medications to those that cannot afford to pay.

A family's financial resources are vested in their livestock. When money is needed, family members will take the animal(s) to the market to sell. Elders explain that the expense of visiting the hospital, frequently described as a "one-way journey," is often not worth the cost of the animals. Ayanobasiya describes the importance of having a properly conducted funeral, which involves the sacrifice of several animals. The animals are necessary for the deceased to enter the world of the ancestors.

> When the old people are sick and they know that they are going to die, they know that the animals will be used to send them to the hospital. The family uses the animals to perform their funerals and the elders do not want the animals to be taken to get money to pay the hospital. If those animals are in the house, it will be better for them when they die to use those animals to perform their funeral than to take them and use them for the hospital.

Other families have specific taboos that prevent them from using certain healing traditions. One family was described as having a particular sorcery medicine in their home that made it taboo for family members to receive biomedical care. If a family member were to go to the hospital, it would offend the spirits, incur their wrath, and cause misfortunes. Norbert, the community health nurse, noted that, while there are practices that restrict biomedical care seeking, poverty is the most significant barrier.

> Sometimes the man is aware that the child is sick, but he will say 'Let me go and do this work to get money and tomorrow we will take the child to the hospital.' Even if the man does not agree to take a child to the hospital, it's because of poverty. For me, I always attribute it to poverty, because if you have money and they say that this child is sick, you will be

> urged to take the child to a health facility. But, if you are going to search for money, to send a fowl or whatever to market to get the money, it will not be instant. A man may go to the market and not get the money. [In such a case] the man may not agree with the woman to take the child to the hospital, or they will all decide not to go.

The following case study brings together the characteristics described above to illustrate the help-seeking and decision-making experiences of a family with a sick infant.

Leah: Help-Seeking Case Study

While making his weekly rounds through several smaller communities, Elijah heard about a sick infant with encephalitis and a "skeleton body." Some community members were commenting that it might be a spirit child. Elijah and I decided to visit Leah, the sick infant, and her family to see if it was possible to help her.

Elijah and I arrived at the family compound in the middle of the dry season heat. While commenting on the heat, Elijah remarked that people were really starting to suffer.

"The famine season," I acknowledged in a low voice as we got out of the truck and walked to the compound. "Are families starting to run out of food?"

"Yes," he replied. "The poorer families are having a hard time now. This time of year is always hard. Wait until you get to May and June. Once you survive that, you'll be eating again."

"Is this family we are visiting poor?"

Elijah nodded his head and we ducked into the sun shelter outside the entrance of the family compound. We introduced ourselves to Akoka, the father, who was sitting there.

After I began my fieldwork, I became interested in how my assistants were able to quickly define who was poor and who was not. Over time, I learned that numerous variables were present. For example, the physical appearance of their home, a family's social network, conflicts, number of animals, number of dependents in the family, their physical and mental health, and other factors. Now, as Elijah and I sat down on the logs scattered in the shade, I glanced around the outside of the compound. It was in a state of disrepair and few animals were present. Even the inquisitive children that usually gather around to listen were missing.

We exchanged customary greetings with Akoka and he explained that his wife Ayampoka was fetching water. Their daughter Leah was with her and they would return soon. When Ayampoka returned from fetching water, she unwrapped the 3kg. (6.6lb.) three-month-old infant from her back and sat in the shade with us. She uncovered the baby for us to see. It was difficult to contain my shock. The child had encephalitis, a malnourished and skeletal-like body, and laid there motionless. Her body was also quite rigid. I asked the mother more about her condition.

"Every day she has a hot body," the mother told me. "And once every day for the past two months she shakes and cries out when she does that."

"The child also had diarrhea," the father stated. "But it's been some time since she has passed feces."

I was concerned about the weight of the child. "Is she able to breastfeed?" I asked the mother.

"Yes, she sucks well, but I do not produce much milk any more."

It was obvious that the child needed to go to the hospital soon. I asked a few more questions and, aware of the rumors in the community, I asked if they believed that the child was a spirit child.

"No," replied the mother. "It's not a spirit child."

"Why not?"

"My family does not believe in those things," she responded.

"Some families in this area do not have the spirit child in their family," Elijah added. "Either they do not believe in it, or they never experienced one."

"Have you taken this child to the health clinic?" I asked Akoka.

"Yes," he responded. His voice was a low monotone. "We saw a community health nurse and he advised that we take Leah to the hospital as soon as possible. Ayampoka walked to the Navrongo hospital (16km). But she arrived at the hospital with only 12,000 cedis ($1.30), not the 22,000 cedis required to get the medical card and see a doctor. So she brought Leah home."

I nodded my head in silence, frustrated that they had traveled so far with such a sick child and that the hospital turned them away. Leah needed to go to the regional hospital as soon as possible, but Elijah and I were unable to take the child that moment due to other obligations that afternoon. It would be several days before we were able to come back to take her.

When I thought about Leah's situation, I found myself in my frustration blaming her father for failing to get treatment. I also found myself making other uninformed and reactive assumptions about the family's situation. My field notes reflected my frustration and a narrow outlook that failed to consider that there were other factors bearing on this family. The evening after visiting Leah, I wrote:

> Wouldn't a father try everything possible to help his child? What bothers me about all this is that the father could have sold just one fowl or something. They could have gone back to the hospital later, but he didn't. They made one trip, and it appears inconceivable that they would try to go again. I am troubled by the fact that the father appeared so detached as we looked at the child. He seemed like he didn't give a damn one way or another if the child lived or died. The father was strangely silent.

Several days later, before returning to visit the family and take them to the hospital, I reviewed my notes from the previous visit and recognized how inadequate they were and how I was missing the bigger picture. I also recognized that even if the father sold a fowl to get the extra money for admission into the hospital, the family would still be unable to pay for the necessary medications or fed themselves as they attended to Leah at the hospital. I began to wonder if their decision not to return to the hospital was due to their recognition of the grim reality of the situation. Had I encountered them at a point when they realized that there was nothing more that they could do? Had they already spent everything they had? I realized that I had not asked enough questions to fully assess the situation, but merely jumped to conclusions.

Normally, Nankani family members do not automatically divulge everything about a medical condition or their situation if the questioner does not ask specifically about it, particularly if that person is a stranger. They assume that, if the interviewer or healthcare provider does not ask about it, it must not be important. When I started fieldwork, I initially interpreted and attributed the short responses or lack of elaboration to evasiveness or discomfort, when in actuality, the respondent was telling me only what he or she deemed necessary. I witnessed this in the clinics and hospitals too. Patients would not disclose important information that would otherwise help the clinician make a more accurate diagnosis unless the clinician specially asked. What people choose to disclose about their condition reveals much about how they interpret illness and their body. It also reveals what should and should not be shared with strangers who have the potential to use your disclosures to harm you and your family.

Elijah and I returned to take Ayampoka and Leah to the hospital. While we were waiting for Ayampoka to get ready, I took the opportunity to find out more about their situation from her husband Akuka. I asked him to tell me about the things the family has done to help Leah during that past few months.

"We went to the health center and to many herbalists," he told me. "Even my in-laws came and saw the condition of the child. They sent another herbalist here to treat her. After the treatments, I did see some small improvement and I continued to send fowls to the herbalists. We went to the health center again and Ayampoka had to walk to the hospital with the child, but she did not have enough money for treatment."

"Did you have any fowls to sell for the treatment at the hospital?" I asked.

"I used or sold most of my fowls to pay for Leah's treatment. Last year, I had a sore on my leg and couldn't farm enough food. We are currently suffering from lack of food. I want to travel to Kumasi to visit my younger brother to ask if he could help out with money or food."

I nodded.

"When I realized I had nothing left that I could do," he said quietly, "I stopped and sat down." *Sitting down* indicates that a person is contemplating something serious, making a decision, or discussing a family situation with others. "I sat and said that if the child should live that is fine, if she is to die then that is fine. I have done all I could, and now I am stopping. This is now in the child's hands."

I nodded again. "How many children are you supporting?"

"Six. I live in this compound with my brother, but he died recently. His wife and child farm a different area and I'm not feeding them."

"Was it difficult," I asked, "knowing there was nothing more you could do for Leah?"

"Yes. There's nothing left, that is why I now have to go to my relatives in Kumasi."

Soon, Ayampoka came out of the house with Leah and we drove to the hospital, completed the necessary paperwork, and had the child examined by a physician. I accompanied Ayampoka and Leah into the room and observed. The doctor examined Leah and asked her mother what was wrong. Much as I had experienced earlier, Ayampoka offered a brief statement indicating what she felt was important. She stated that the child had diarrhea and a hot body but offered little additional information. Community members place a great deal of trust in doctors and expect them to be able to determine, often with medical instruments, what the problem is with little input on their part.

The examination continued with little dialogue. Right before Leah was sent to the lab for tests, I briefly mentioned that she has also been having convulsions on a daily basis and that the mother was unable to produce enough breast milk. The doctor took note of the convulsions while the nurse accusingly questioned the mother about feeding. "Have you been eating enough? You need to be sure to eat more," she declared. The mother remained silent and appeared intimidated.

Leah was admitted to the hospital, though not without misunderstandings. Although I was not present, Elijah described how Ayampoka refused to let the nurses take Leah and begin treatment. She remarked that she did not want the child to have all those drugs, nor did she want so many other people touching or caring for her child. The nurses attempted to explain why they had to take Leah, but the mother continued to refuse and threatened to run away with the child. At one point Elijah physically blocked her attempted exit. It was the other mothers in the neonatal room, when they heard the commotion, who came to comfort Ayampoka, told her their stories and convinced her to stay. Although I was unable to visit her again, the last time I heard Leah was back home and doing well.

The mother's powerful emotional response and investment in Leah, and the father's efforts to try everything possible to help his three-month-old daughter, all contradict assumptions of low parental investment and detachment in regions with high infant mortality and limited resources. Although I develop a more complete argument concerning parental sentiments in chapter 8, I want to emphasize the particular details of this case to lay the foundation for that chapter. Specifically, upon Leah's birth and the recognition of her condition, which occurred during the first weeks of the dry season, the family was already coping with the grim reality they were going to face in the coming months. Despite the poor harvest from the previous season and the family's limited means, they invested considerable resources as they searched for treatments from the health clinic and various traditional healers and herbalists and, finally, an attempt at accessing a hospital with their remaining funds. The family took a significant risk and gave everything it could when the odds were against the child—an economic risk that would not have paid off if the NGO had not heard of their plight.

I also present this case to put a more human face on this community's care-seeking and decision-making process and to highlight the reality of the related economic and transportation barriers. I call attention to the fact that it is often easy and inaccurate to assume on the basis of one brief visit that a family member is not invested in the child. We can also see from the nurse's comments how things are frequently more complicated than just eating more to increase milk production. My initial knee-jerk reaction, as evident from my field notes, is similar to the reactions of many non-local health or NGO workers I observed—a reaction based on less than the whole story.

Often, the development discourse concerning fathers in the region casts them as detached, self-centered men who have no interest in their wives or children. In this case, although it initially appeared that the father Akura was detached, once I'd inquired into factors operating beneath the surface, the reality that emerged was far different and more complex. A brief assessment of a family, as typified by my initial contact with Akuka, can leave development workers with impressions that do little more than confirm biases and stereotypes.

This chapter described the methods used in this dissertation and a range of background information related to the Nankani people—including their geographic setting, history, and health context. The subsequent three chapters explore foundational social and cultural themes that contextualize the later chapters concerning the spirit child phenomenon specifically. Within the next chapter, I describe the Nankani family and kinship system and notion of personhood.

CHAPTER 3

For the House

"Hey, give me back my notebook," I yelled. Asorigiya's wife had unexpectedly snatched it from my hands as I emerged from her room into the courtyard of the family compound. The other women of the house openly laughed at me and gathered around to watch the commotion. The men also took note, but stood back along the meter-high perimeter wall, some even retreated to its opposite side. I hardly noticed the men's amused expressions, partly due to the shock of the woman's unexpected advance. I didn't want to lose sight of her as she backed against the inner wall of the compound.

I begged her to return my things, but she refused. I was confused. I'd never been teased in such a way, particularly by an older woman, or had my things snatched away in such a dramatic fashion. I didn't know how to respond.

"You're always talking to my husband out there," she announced for all to hear, "but now that you have come in and seen the inside of my room, you must give me something too!"

She was adamant. Over the previous month, I had been paying Asorigiya a small honorarium in exchange for his time spent teaching me about "cultural things." We spent most of our time outside near the entrance of his compound in what is traditionally a man's place. I was unprepared for a change in people's behavior once I entered and explored the privacy of his wife's room that afternoon.

I hesitated and shot a confused look to Mathew, my assistant, hoping he would give me a clue as to what I should do. Mathew laughed. I looked towards the men watching on the other side of the waist-high wall, hoping they would intervene or at least tell me what an appropriate payment was. They shrugged their shoulders and refused to intercede.

Finally, Asorigiya's son spoke up. "You have been inside and seen her things, now you must give her something in return," he urged. No one objected, since it was the proper thing to do. I was no longer in a male space where men's authority pertained—I was in a woman's space. I couldn't disagree. Just as I'd "owed" Asorigiya, I owed her for the "cultural things" she permitted me to see.

With a playful display of reluctance, I dug out a small amount of money and approached her. We timed our exchange perfectly, ensuring that neither of us would snatch the item away from the other without getting one in return. The other women cheered and we laughed together.

As I moved out of the central area of the compound, over the short wall, and back outside to the shade tree near the entrance, I was struck by the contrasts between gendered spaces, particularly how certain locations increase or diminish one's authority and freedoms according to gender and age. The juxtaposition between the social norms governing behavior on the one hand and interactions inside and outside the compound on the other are significant. As this incident shows, within the compound women can act aggressively towards men, behavior that is often uncharacteristic in many other settings. Asorigiya's wife would have not been able to take my notebook if I had been sitting outside the compound.

Mathew explained that each part of the family compound has a particular gender-based ascription. "The whole household is always for the women," he remarked.

"So," I asked, "If a man enters the house and the woman doesn't want him there, can she tell him to go?"

"Of course," Mathew replied. "When a woman and a man are alone, it's the woman that's stronger."

"When they are inside the house?"

"Yes. Outside it's the man. You have to be in command when outside. People know that is your wife."

The objective of this and the following two chapters is to describe the interrelated domains of the Nankani sociocultural world that can deepen our understanding and analysis of the spirit child phenomenon. This chapter specifically addresses the characteristics of the Nankani house, kinship system, the role of ancestors, and Nankani notions of personhood. I also discuss the attributes and importance placed upon the family and the significance of children's names.

The "House"

This section describes the physical arrangement of the *yiri*, or house, particularly in relation to gendered spaces. The house is not only the physical space of several rooms enclosed by a compound wall where the extended family lives, but it also signifies the larger extended family. Hence, one's family and one's house are inseparable constructs. This is reflected during the greeting process when it is customary to ask, "*Yiri la ani nwani*?" (lit. "House it is how?", that is, "How is the house?"). A man might also state, for instance, that he has to return to his mother's house to complete a ritual obligation. This refers not only to the physical location of the house, but fact that he is returning to the origin of his mother and his maternal relatives. The use of house to refer to one's family and clan is common through Africa (Gottlieb 1992:50). In this paper, I use *house* to describe a family or the combined notion of the compound and the family. I use *compound* to describe the physical structure of the house, similar to Fortes' use of the term *homesteads* (1949). Understanding of the house is important to the understanding of the spirit child, since the goal of the spirit child is to destroy the house and, as we see in later chapters, descriptions of the spirit child's activities are linked to the physical structure of the house and symbolism present within it.

The Nankani house is symbolic of the greater family social relations and is a central foundation for the family. Not only are family members born within the house, they are also buried within the remains of an old family compound (usually indicated by a dirt mound or rise in the earth near an existing compound), symbolizing their connection to the family and ancestors. Although most family compounds are similar in design, each compound can reveal a great deal about the characteristics and status of its owner (cf. Fortes 1949:49). The general condition of a compound and the ways in which it may vary from other compounds reveal a family's socioeconomic status, sickness, internal strife, size, and the industriousness of its owner. The physical condition, size, and organization of the compound are indicative of the condition, size, and organization of the family.

Family compounds are spaced throughout the KND landscape and are separated by farms and garden plots. A vast network of paths and roads leading between farmland, compounds, markets, and the bush are inscribed upon the land and are indicative of the larger kinship networks linking many of the compounds. In fact, one could map kinship relations according to the network of connecting paths and the extent of their use.

During the wet season—when the millet reaches over eight feet in height—paths tunnel and snake between farms and eventually open onto compounds in small clearings. Often, 30 or more people live within a family compound, though sizes can vary considerably—ranging from six to over 60 family members. It is infrequent that all family members are home at the same time, since many migrate to southern Ghana for work.

Earthen walls, which can be from three to seven feet in height, form the perimeter of a compound by spanning the spaces between individual one-room structures positioned in a semi-circular arrangement around a central courtyard. When approaching a compound, the path and wall of the compound directs visitors to the main entrance opening to a west-to-southwesterly direction. Community members explained that compounds face this direction because the west is not only the origin of most rain and windstorms but, as Asorigiya described, "It is about the bad things that always come from that direction." Mathew also remarked:

> In the olden days they make sure that the entrance always faced this direction. That is the direction where many families came from, the Azuko side. If they see someone running from that direction, they know that there is a war, so they get up. Once the entrance is made facing that side, they build the rooms all around the whole house. They also make sure that the entrance does not align with a tree.

Having a tree aligned with the entrance to one's house is spiritually dangerous and aesthetically disjunctive. No one wants to leave their home to walk directly into a tree.

A man's decision to construct a new house is often the result of on-going disagreements and problems within the extended family, or when the man's family reaches a size where it is impractical to live with his father and brothers' families. Traditionally, when a man makes the decision to leave his house and build a new one, he takes his bow and arrows and his wife takes a basket containing a pot with selected belongings, and they walk from the house. Asorigiya explained: "When people see you doing that, they know that you are looking for a new house, so people will try to prevent you from leaving your father's house." Neighbors will inquire about what is wrong or what could be so serious to make a man "rise up" and leave. The family will summon the *tindana*, or master of the earth—a clan "landlord" who maintains ritual and jural authority over family land—and the son's case will be heard. If the son is adamant that he must have his own house and claims that it is the only way to settle his problems, the *tindana* and elders will decide where he will settle. The man and his family will move to their new home and construct a temporary shelter of wood and grass. With the help of other family members, they will construct the traditional women's room, followed by the kitchen area and other rooms placed in a semi-circular pattern around a central courtyard. As the family grows, the compound will grow and new rooms will be added.

When approaching a compound a large shade tree is visible near the entrance and often a sun shelter as well. Logs, stones, and occasionally a bench are positioned as sitting areas outside the entrance. This men's space is where visiting, meeting, eating, and decision-making occurs. Women often sit and visit within this area, but will depart when elders conduct official business or hold serious discussions. Since the compound can become quite hot in the dry season, women sometimes have their own shade areas around the outside of the compound where they sit and visit. My interviews with one woman elder took place at this side location rather than near the entrance to the compound, as was usually the case with the men I interviewed.

During the dry season, a male elder will typically move from within his sleeping room inside the compound to the entrance of the compound. He will visit with others, supervise work projects, eat, watch the coming and going of family members, and facilitate discussions or debates. Several ancestral shrines are also located near the entrance of the compound. Among other functions, the shrines and the ancestors who dwell around them protect the entrance of the house. Since the ancestors are near the shrines, they are able to intercede if someone—or some spiritual being—is sneaking into the house. "If a thief is coming," Elijah remarked, "he must pass through the gateway [the entrance]. Because the ancestors are lying there, they know the man is coming and they can tell the owner this."

The entrance to the compound is a symbolic and vulnerable boundary representing the transition from undomesticated to domestic space and, further from the compound, bush space. This is the primary entrance and exit of the house and an area where family members can observe who is coming and going. An informant described the gateway as an "authorized" or "approved" exit that family members will use when going about their daily business. However, if someone does not want to be seen they use the "unapproved exits," for example, climbing over the walls or a using a secondary back exit. Such unregulated entrances and exits are a cause for concern and may be indicative of hidden activities such as witchcraft or extramarital liaisons. Using unapproved exits and transgressing the proper house—and thus family—boundaries can make the house vulnerable to problems and unwanted entities such as the spirit child.

Upon passing through the main entrance to the compound, one enters the "yard," a foyer-like space where the animals are kept in the evening. The yard may contain chicken coops and one or more "barns" or granaries (*baare*)—large mud conical structures up to 10 feet in height. The largest barn is for the eldest of the family, and access to it is usually restricted. Sometimes the eldest wife is able to enter this barn to get food, but generally women are prohibited from entering the barn to retrieve grain. The eldest son is also prohibited from looking inside of the barn (cf. Fortes 1959). The barn is a man's private space where he may keep any important items and store grain and seed. A woman's equivalent private storage space is the area within her room where she keeps her pots and valuables.

Proceeding from the yard into the courtyard of the compound, one must step or slide over a waist-high wall, its top surface worn smooth from generations of passage. This wall represents a formal transition into the women's space. Positioned around the courtyard are numerous one- and two-room mud structures where family members reside. Better-off families may provide newer structures with steel roofing and other amenities. Traditional structures often have stairs built into the side that allow access to the flat rooftop, a popular place to sleep during the heat of the dry season and also a place to dry herbs and vegetables after the harvest. Extended family compounds—and those of families where the man has more than one wife—may have sections divided by low walls that separate each of the family groups. Each family within the compound may also have a separate cooking area. Such separation is necessary, one man claimed, to maintain peace in the family.

The first-built and most important structure in the compound is the woman's traditional room. This is where the family sleeps, particularly a mother and her young children. Men often have a separate room where they sleep when their wife is nursing an infant. To enter the woman's room, one must duck down low to the ground and crawl through the doorway. Inside, the dark room is much cooler than the sweltering heat of the courtyard, with numerous sleeping mats stored above in the rafters, medicine items and shrines standing in the corners, and the woman's pots or belongings hanging against a wall. A small platform, worn smooth from years of grinding millet, is positioned below a small hole cut in the roof, through which a stream of light illuminates the workspace.

Daily activities vary according to the season. Typically, people awake just before or as the sun rises. Women and children will gather water for bathing and daily needs from boreholes, wells, and dams. Often family members must walk considerable distances to fetch water, particularly during the dry season. During the wet season, families will work their various farm plots, weeding or harvesting. The dry season is the time for repairs to homes or the construction of new buildings. Most festivals and funerals also occur during the increased socializing of the dry season. Some days may require a trip to the local market, which in major villages occur every third day. Animals, vegetables, grain, and other supplies may be sold and news and gossip shared at the market.

Although locations throughout the family compound are specifically designated for each gender, children have significant flexibility in their ability to navigate between these spaces. A young boy may spend time inside the compound with his mother but he may also be encouraged to sit observing or playing near the men who are conversing outside. As children move toward puberty, there is the expectation that they spend more time in their respective gendered spaces, learning the tasks associated with that role. A man explained: "When you are a boy and you are fond of sitting inside it means that you are a woman. You have to come and sit and listen to the men speak. It is only the women who are supposed to be there."

Children are rarely excluded from adult conversations. In fact, a "good child" is expected to observe adult interactions. "When you have a good child in the family," Asingiya remarked, "it's a child who sits with the father and the elders and listens to what pertains to the community and the family. When the elders are no more, he is the one that will still have that knowledge. The child who roams without even sitting with the elders is not a good child."

Indeed, I was consistently impressed with how children would sit with adults, or come to meetings and quietly observe events. When bored or distracted, they would simply get up and walk away, often coming back later to continue listening. Children appeared genuinely interested in adult conversations and had, when compared to North American children I have observed, long attention spans. Some eight- and nine-year-olds would quietly observe hour-long interviews and lengthy conversations. Adults respected children's interest in their affairs, making space for children on benches and offering them places in the shade. If children became disruptive, they were sent away or reprimanded.

Around two years of age, a child begins spending more time away from his or her mother and joins other children in playgroups. These playgroups are frequently comprised of children of various ages. A seven- or eight-year-old girl may be charged with caring for a younger sibling. Older children (age eight and above) often have playgroups that are separate from the younger children. The younger children will follow behind these groups and mimic the older children's behaviors and games, dancing or playing on the periphery. Once a child is able to roam with the other children with minimal adult supervision—behavior expected when a child is around three years of age—the parents consider having another child.

These then are the characteristics of the Nankani house and age and gender related spaces, which are the basis of the Nankani social world. The following sections describe my use of binary distinctions to describe central elements of the Nankani sociocultural world, the fundamentals of Nankani kinship structure, the importance of ancestors, and notions of personhood.

Binary Distinctions

The preceding section has described common binary distinctions used in descriptions and analysis of West African societies: "domestic space—bush space," "female—male," and "dry season—wet season." At the beginning of my fieldwork, I wanted to avoid categorizing people's behaviors and beliefs into dichotomous pairs but it proved difficult to avoid these distinctions. They appeared with increasingly frequency in my field notes and in my descriptions of how people appeared to organize their world.

In addition to the gendered distinctions I've previously mentioned, community members frequently referenced the essential *good* or *bad* nature of many different entities. In a conversation about trees, for example, a man remarked, "You have some trees that behave like human beings, in the same sense that you have bad humans and good. The trees also help us: the foods, the shade they provide. Everything that lives on this earth has a bad quality and a good quality, even rocks." The notion of a good and bad spirit child is also present.

The use of binary distinctions in descriptions of cultures is useful as long as one is careful, as Gottlieb cautions, not to confuse spheres such as forest and village with Levi-Strauss's nature and culture dichotomy. It's important to bear in mind that these distinctions—or the generation of separate analytic categories—might be more of a Euro-American "artifact" than an accurate reflection of local understandings (Gottlieb 1992:17-18, 27). Janzen highlights how the larger domains and distinctions between forest and village, particularly in regards to healing, are indicative of "the symbolic realm through which an experience is given meaning" (1978:203). Indeed, disease and self/society relationships are locally conceptualized and understood to lie within these distinctions, or "contrasts" as Jackson (1989) calls them. I found that these distinctions are central to shaping Nankani experience and their frequent appearance throughout this work is deliberate.

Kinship and Ancestors

Kinship and clan is the foundation of all social, cultural, and religious dimensions of the Nankani people and neighboring groups (cf. Awedoba 2000, Mendonsa 1982, 2001, Fortes 1945, 1987). As Fortes identified for the Tallensi, the entire Nankani social system centers upon the unbroken continuity of their patrilineal lineage system and the powerful role of family ancestors (1945:26). Fortes found kinship to be so important to understanding the Tallensi that he devoted two volumes, the *Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi* (1945) and the *Web of Kinship among the Tallensi* (1949) to the subject. Although Fortes held several misconceptions about Tallensi social life—particularly his static representations of the social system (see Allman & Parker 2005 for a complete critique)—many of his observations regarding clan and family structure among the Nankani people remain valid. I include this overview on kinship and the family structure because the threats and concerns associated with the spirit child are concentrated on the disruption of the family system, and because ancestors are involved in the spirit child diagnostic process. Additionally, understandings of the fundamental notions of Nankani personhood, which is central to fully understanding the context of the spirit child, are largely dependent on an individual's position or role within their family, clan, and larger social system.

The Nankani follow an agnatic descent system. They are clan exogamous and patrilocal. Historically, polygyny was common and dependent upon a man's ability to support multiple wives and children. Polygyny is still practiced, although to a much lesser extent than 30 years ago.

A newborn belongs exclusively to the father's lineage. This is reflected in the frequently heard statement: "A child is for the man." In actuality, it is more accurate to note that the child is for the man's lineage: the elders, ancestors, and the larger family unit. An individual's line of descent carries with it the basic attributes of their social personality. Identification and social positioning of the individual occurs according to their clan membership and their age-relative role within their clan. Male elders have the most significant clan responsibility and are accountable for the jural, decision-making, and ritual institutions central to governing the relationship within the extended family (*yiri*), the clan (*bisi*), and beyond.

The eldest male member of the clan is responsible for any issues or problems that arise within the clan and for major sacrifices. Asorigiya remarked, "The clan elder's house is always there. If there's a problem, or even if it is something good, like after a bountiful harvest, we will go to the house of the eldest clan member to pour libations and sacrifice. For certain occasions, all clan members have to send something to the house." Each house has recognized head who is responsible for minor issues, for decision-making, and for sacrifices and other matters related to the family's ancestors.

The veneration of ancestors is the bedrock of the family structure. Family and clan ancestors play an enormously important role, participating in all domains of individual and family life. Even before birth, the expected child is under the influence and watchful eye of the ancestors. During the pregnancy and/or after the child is born (there is some variation between clans), the family head will visit a diviner to determine if the child is "for the family." These divination sessions help the family determine the child's identity as a member of the family and what role the ancestors will play in the child's life. Soon after birth, the child is bestowed a name by an ancestor.

Throughout the life of a Nankani person, the ancestors are implicated in many if not all events, from sickness to good fortune. Ancestors reward individuals and families with good fortune or punish them for a wide range of possible transgressions. Ancestors are also able to protect family members from potential threats or actions against them. Divination is the primary means to communicate with the ancestors and to determine the sacrifices required to thank or placate them. Sacrifices range from water or alcohol libations to small animals such as fowls and large animals such as cows. A man describes the purpose of divination:

> You will not be able to tell what is causing any of the problems that you are having. But when you go to the soothsayer's [diviner's] house, it is through the soothsaying that the ancestors will be able to communicate what has happened. Or, if you are doing something that is in the wrong direction, or if someone is trying to do something to harm you, it is through soothsaying that the ancestor will speak to you and tell you this is what is happening.

Ancestors make their presence and needs known by causing misfortunes, and they can be particularly vindictive. Misfortunes are a result of a family member's intentional and unintentional transgressions or occur as a notification to an individual or family that they need to attend to the ancestor's specific desires. Ayanobasiya describes the cause of misfortune in a house:

> When people are sick in the family, or when other bad things happen in the family, it means that the owner or someone else in the house has not

> obeyed the ancestors. The ancestors asked for something and maybe they did not give. That's why the ancestors cause sickness in the family. You then go to the soothsayer's house and identify the ancestor that did it. Maybe you didn't do this for the ancestor, that is why he is making you sick. If you are able to do those things, provide those necessary things for the ancestor, the sickness will go away.

To become an ancestor, one must achieve full personhood and often have status as an elder. One's status as a full person is confirmed through divination, which occurs during the funeral. Upon a death, a person's spirit enters a liminal state and roams about the land often living near the clan's ancestral shrines. Only the completion of the final funeral rites, usually taking place several years after an elder's death, sends the individual to the ancestors and authorizes them to exert their influence upon the living.

If the person has lived a long or important life, their children or grandchildren may create an ancestral shrine for them and offer sacrifices in their honor. The smaller or genealogically immediate ancestors are represented by the shrines located in front of the house. Larger clan ancestors, those that are genealogically distant, are represented at the *tingane*, or tree shrines, a sacred cluster of trees where offerings to clan ancestors (of the maximal lineage) are made.

Clan members are aware of the identity of their primary family and clan ancestors, and are often able to trace their lineage back to the founding ancestors, which can exceed ten generations. Clan size is directly relative to how many children you are able to have. A large clan is very desirable, but not just because children represent the perpetuation of the clan. Often, scholarly explanations for high parity are described as a response to high infant and child mortality or are characterized as a sort of "retirement plan" for parents. This retirement-plan perspective is not necessarily complete or accurate, since it overlooks local understandings of why large numbers of children are desired.

First, as mentioned already, large numbers of children ensure the growth of the clan and its existence into perpetuity. Second, it is essential to leave behind many children, particularly male children, who can sacrifice. This is to ensure that you not only make it to the ancestral world through a properly performed funeral, but that once you are an ancestor you will be fed and cared for through these sacrifices. Elders expressed serious concern that once they die their child will not perform a proper funeral to send them to the ancestral world, or that no one will perform the necessary sacrifices to feed them in the afterlife, forcing them into the humiliating position of having to beg from others. This concern was most common within families where the children converted to Christianity or Islam or had migrated.

Although the Nankani are patrilineal, an individual's matrilateral side is important because it confers its own distinct set of social roles and relationships that influence the politico-legal system (Turner 1969:117). Turner observes that, under the Tallensi patrilineal system, individuals connect with other members of society matrilaterally and hence, by "extension and abstraction," women and femininity tend to symbolize the broader community network and its ethical system (1969:117). I found similar parallels during my fieldwork. For men, matrilateral relationships allow the man to "extend a widely cast net of less formal contacts" outside the structure and confines of his agnatic lineage, "which defines the basis for formal, legal personhood" (Shaw 2000:31, Fortes 1949).

The importance and strength of a Nankani person's matrilateral kin is expressed in the avuncular relationship. The Nankani have strong relationships with uncles, that is, the mother's brother. During my fieldwork, the importance of this relationship was highlighted when my own uncle came to visit. Although my uncle Dan was not blood related (he was my mother's sister's husband), community members understood his relationship to me as that of "uncle." Few were surprised that he came to visit me while my parents did not. An elder remarked that Dan's visit was the correct thing for an uncle to do, and that God placed us on this world in such pairs to watch out for and to remember each other. After Dan's visit, a man affirming this importance rhetorically, asked, "What would we do without our uncles?"

One afternoon, while talking about families, Asorigiya asked, "Is your uncle important? Do you go to your uncle's house when something goes wrong, or when someone dies?" Elijah also talked about his uncle: "He taught me how to make a good argument and [how I can] always win in family disputes. When others escalate the argument, don't you escalate too. Stay silent. When it comes time for them to ask your opinion, you bring up one point that will bring their argument down and they all come down together to this one level."

While discussing kinship Mathew remarked: "Your strength lies in your uncle's house. That's where your mother comes from. A man has power in his uncle's house; any power you have comes from there. You can go to your uncle's house and do anything. Within your father's house you don't have that power." If there is a dispute or other problem within the house, a man or a woman has the right to leave without explanation by simply stating that they are going to their uncle's house. Women also retreat to their uncle's house in a time of need.

The uncle is outside of and not bound by the patrilineal jural structure. When things are overwhelming or there is a crisis, a person can go to his or her uncle. He is often consulted for a clear and trusted "outside" perspective on situations. Yet despite the power represented by one's avuncular and matrilateral ties, such relationships cannot override the agnatic ties and do not extend beyond the personal level to the formation of jural or, as Fortes characterizes it, "corporate" groups (1949).

While the patrilineal side is regarded as a transparent structure in which the norms and expectations are relatively clear, the matrilateral side is frequently associated with the hidden or concealed dimensions of the family. For example, the intergenerational transmission of witchcraft powers occurs though the mother. In a symbolic sense, women and the power of the family's maternal line represent an entry into the patrilineal system that is regarded with ambiguity. The ambiguous powers associated with the matrilateral line are discussed in the following two chapters.

Importance of the Family

In the course of my fieldwork, I quickly recognized how being a member of a family is not only necessary for the essential social connections and the bestowal of Nankani personhood, but for basic survival. Stripped of modern conveniences, my own activities of daily living, from getting and making food to hauling, purifying, and managing water, as well as washing and cleaning, monopolized my time. Illness magnified the difficulty of these essential tasks and emphasized to me how a larger support network was essential for survival.

During the first month of my fieldwork, I tended to focus on such obvious survival issues. But I was also curious to see how residents responded to and interpreted my questions about the importance of the family. When I asked my Nankani acquaintances why a family is important, their answers tended to center around the importance of supporting others, particularly the aged in times of need, and the significance of having a family to conduct a proper funeral. Asorigiya describes why a family is important:

> There are many benefits in belonging to the family. If you are old or are sick and you don't have a child nearby, there are other family people that can come and help you. Your people know you belong to that family and can come and help you. They can take you to the hospital, or take you to their treatment place. Or maybe you are weak or poor. [Then] they can organize and come to weed your farm for you to help you. If you are old like me and you die, your funeral will be big, since I belong to a large family. All the family people will come. Even your name itself means that you are from a certain family and that is a great thing.

During a separate interview, I asked Ayanobasiya why she thought a family was important. She responded:

> If some of the children marry and build their house nearby, they still owe their allegiance to the family house. If I'm living and I'm in need, they can all come and support me. What is more important is even the name that you are called, because you come from a certain family. That alone is a great thing. People know that they are from this family. But if you say you don't have a family, and there is no family name attached to you, you don't have any significance. If there is something happening within the family—maybe they are going to do something or there is a funeral—they will all come together to support each other. Maybe there is an older person in the family who cannot farm. [Then] they will all come to support that person. It is good to be part of the family.

I observed a few cases of individuals without families. One older man, who was mostly blind, wandered around between villages. This seemed unusual. I asked Joe why he was alone and his family did not care for him. Joe described how the man had been nasty and mean his entire life. Much of his family had moved away and refused to support him. He wandered, looking for handouts.

Being able to call upon family members when in need and having a family to perform your funeral were very common themes. And having an identity conferred upon you by virtue of your family membership was seen as essential. In fact, one's very personhood was contingent upon membership within a family.

Infancy, Naming, and Basic-Personhood

Preparations and concerns surrounding a coming or newborn child illustrate several key elements of the Nankani social structure, cultural practices and, particularly, notions of what constitutes a *human being* and a *person*. When a newborn comes to a family, a man explained, "the first thing the family does is consult a soothsayer to determine whether the new baby is for the family and if it is a normal human being or not." Consultations with diviners occur before, during, and after the coming of a child. These consultations help determine the intentions and destiny of the child, the ancestral desires for the child, and if the child will be good or bad for the family. When and how often these consultations occur vary within each family's tradition, as some families will consult several times before birth and others directly after the birth. A man explains the process:

> When you marry, you have to go to the soothsayer house to find out whether the woman is able to give birth. When she gives birth, it is through soothsaying that you find out if the child is coming from God. You can also soothsay to see what the child will do on earth. You can find out that maybe the child will be a great person in the family. That means that he will live long or be a great ancestor. Sometimes, they can say that the child that is coming is not good. If so, you have to ask further to know what can you do to prevent that. You have to ask so you can perform certain sacrifices and ceremonies to prevent the bad children from coming.

The coming of a child is an exciting but also ambivalent time for family members. The intentions of the child and its status as a member of the family are questionable, since the newborn is either from the ancestors or could be a spirit child from the bush. This uncertainty is addressed and often resolved through divination. If a family elder, through divination, discovers that the child is "not for the family" (i.e., is a spirit child or is illegitimate), he can consult with the ancestors to determine what the family can do to protect themselves or ensure that the coming child will be *for* the family. This section focuses on one possible outcome of pregnancy and childhood, that is, the arrival and development of a good child, a child that is "for the family," rather than another possible outcome, of the arrival of a spirit child (which I focus upon later).

Traditionally, a woman will often give birth in her husband's house with the help of a more senior woman. Some women do return to their mothers' houses to give birth or go to the medical clinic or hospital. After a child is born, family members ritually bathe the child and take it back into its mother's room where it remains concealed inside for a specified period. The length of concealment varies according to family tradition and ranges from a few weeks to several months. This seclusion is to help protect the child from both physical and spiritual or naturalist and personalistic dangers.

By virtue of the family system and the importance of kinship, an infant who is regarded as *for the family* is born into a preestablished social role and relationship with the family and ancestors. When compared to Western traditions, Nankani infants and young children are assigned considerable ability to make choices, have preferences, and consciously impose themselves upon the world. I observed family members recounting infants' behaviors and imbuing them with higher-level adult awareness and problem-solving skills. Attributing to infants decision-making powers and knowledge of not only this world, but that of the previous world, is found in other parts of West Africa. Gottlieb describes how adults regard infants in the Beng culture as having their own desires and their own memories of the place from whence they came (2004).

How is an infant positioned within the Nankani family? To understand this, we must first understand what it means to be a Nankani person. I frame personhood as a social fact independent of any notion of self (Csordas 1994:332). Specifically, personhood can be bestowed upon beings recognized within a society as having a degree of agency as a social actor. This classification can include, as Hallowell (1955) articulates, non-human beings such as ancestors and spirits. Moreover, personhood does not occupy a fixed or guaranteed status. For example, within the Nankani context, personhood can be removed or enhanced throughout one's existence in this world and during the transition into the afterlife.

Fortes (1987) emphasizes that personhood among the Tallensi is not conferred until death when the funeral divination indicates that the deceased is a real person and not a bush spirit masquerading as a person. Fortes notes that personhood develops over an individual's lifespan. One must marry, have children, and live a full life in order to be elevated to the cult of ancestors (Fortes 1987:265, 1949).

Personhood among the Nankani is also dynamic, growing throughout one's life. But personhood may also be reduced or revoked. Family members and the ancestors bestow the essential qualities of humanness and personhood soon after a child is born. I describe this as "basic personhood." Basic personhood grows or is removed throughout one's life according to one's social interactions, position within society, and age. An individual can either achieve what I term "complete personhood" at their death—as Fortes describes in the above paragraph—or it may be determined that they were not persons or even human after all.

Investing a Nankani infant with basic personhood is dependent upon and occurs by virtue of the infant's relationship with the ancestral world and the circumstances under which he or she was born. First, when an infant is born, family members determine if the child is a "normal human being" (*nerisaala vua*) and for the house. The status of a normal human being is not just dependent on physical characteristics, but ancestral declarations, the absence of unusual or ambiguous circumstances around its birth—such as the death of livestock—and the behavior of the infant. This is determined not only through observation of the child, but divination as well. I now explain how the notion of basic personhood grows from this fundamental status as a normal human being.

At first, it puzzled me how names were chosen and the role that ancestors played in the child's identity as a new social person. People described what sounded like the reincarnation of ancestors who wanted to return to earth to live with the family. These descriptions appeared somewhat similar to reincarnation accounts in other West African societies (cf. Gottlieb 2004:81). My initial thinking was within an "either/or" epistemological framework and I interpreted informants remarks about reincarnation in the strict sense that the ancestor must leave the afterlife to come back to this world. Gottlieb also describes how this "classical Aristotelian framework, which demands that an identity be either one thing or another but not both simultaneously," is not present within Beng thought and notions of identity (2004:81-82). For the Nankani as well, the either/or model did not fit. I asked several people how it was possible that an ancestor can be both in the afterlife and on earth at the same time. When someone makes a sacrifice to their namesake, are they really sacrificing to themselves?

After several months of questioning, a more accurate model came together. Rather than following a strict notion of reincarnation, conceived of as an either/or paradigm, I realized that ancestors could be both at the same time. They do not necessarily decide to leave the afterlife to be reborn but are rather in two places at once. They can be both present in the ancestral world and represented by (or have control of) a newly born child. The child acts as an extension of this ancestor in the world of the living, and like the ancestor, the child can possess dual qualities, that is, be a new individual as well as be someone who has come before.

The ancestors are described as "having control" over a child. When an ancestor establishes or communicates to the family that the child is his or her namesake, the ancestor assumes responsibility for that child. If anything should happen, the ancestor is able to care for the child. Asorigiya remarked that, "the ancestor will still be with God" but also that "the ancestor is also on earth watching over the children named after him." An ancestral name entitles a person to sacrifice to his or her ancestor and ask for the ancestor's protection. If a child or adult prospers and is healthy, this is because the ancestor is watching over that person. In return for good fortune, individuals honor the ancestor by sacrificing and pouring libations to them in the afterlife.

An ancestral name perpetuates the stories and memories of those who came before, and in some respects, allows them to live on. I asked Asingiya if a child named after an ancestor may resemble that person or has the same personality. "It happens," he replied. "My great-ancestor (*nsoyaaba*), was someone who was very hard working. He had a horse and was always about working. So he was the real person that has come back. When that ancestor came back, he was doing the same thing, also following the example of his ancestor." His comments are similar to Gottlieb's discussion of a Beng person's identity as being known and referenced in relation to their ancestor's personality and life circumstances (2004:81).

When a child is born, families in many cases will not immediately bestow a permanent name. A child may simply be called father (*Nso*) or mother (*Nma*) reflecting their connection to the ancestral world. Parents do not choose a name for the child; the child/ancestor will choose. When a child is ready to be named, it will communicate its desire by excessive crying or becoming sick, often with a fever. The family will go to a diviner to determine the cause of the sickness and which ancestor the child wants to be named after or, as was also explained to me, which ancestor wants the child.

Community members describe an infant's body as a sort of battleground for ancestral dominance, with the ancestors struggling with each other to name the infant and determine who the infant will represent or embody on earth. This struggle is visible through the infant's sickness and crying and family members interpret the sickness as the child's desire for a name. Sickness and naming is a formal recognition of the child's relationship to those who have come before and the child's attachment to the larger family system.

If a child remains sick after it is named it is a sign that the name is not correct. Elijah provides an example:

> You have someone with a name like Adongo, who was in this family and died. Maybe years later when a child is born, Adongo will be fighting so that the child will be named after him. So, if Adongo wants the child to be named after him, and you name it Anyaaba instead, Adongo will not agree to that, and they will be fighting. That is why the child will be crying all the time.

The child's name is one of the first steps in its identification as a person and member of a family. As the child is named, a family member will also determine through divination what the child desires as its *pa-ala.* The pa-ala is a symbolic item ensuring the child's success in this world and represents its destiny. If the family is able to determine what pa-ala the child needs to live a long, healthy, and successful life, the child will be able to stay on earth to fulfill its destiny. The pa-ala is most often a bracelet, but can also be a bow and arrow, a particular animal, cloth, or a shirt. I would frequently see elders still wearing the pa-ala given to them as children. Asorigiya's pa-ala was a shirt. As he grew out of the shirt or as it became threadbare, Asorigiya replaced it with a similar shirt, since the original item is not necessarily as important as what it represents. An incorrect pa-ala may cause a child to "give up" on this world and return to the ancestral world. Ayanobasiya remarked, "If [the family] gives the pa-ala, it means that the family will be able to provide for the child. If they are not able, the child can die and go back. The child says that it comes to earth and wants that thing. If you do not give that to him, it means that you are deceiving him, so he will go back to God."

Globalization and modernity—specifically the increased movement of goods and ideas into the region—are changing how families name children. Christian or English names are more popular. Ayanobasiya, when discussing the most striking changes that she has observed in her lifetime, mentioned that few children these days are named after their ancestors. "Because they are given English names, the ancestors no longer fight over them." Further research is needed to determine if local notions of personhood and the self are changing due to reduced use of ancestral names.

In summary, a significant degree of knowledge and decision-making power is attributed to Nankani infants. An infant determined to be for the family is connected to the larger family social structure and social identity. The establishment of basic personhood is negotiated through divination and the interpretation of an infant's demands, as indicated through sickness or crying. Personhood is a diachronic process that family members initially investigate and establish before or soon after birth, and is further constructed and solidified as an individual is named, ages, marries, and has a family. Throughout life, an individual may commit acts—anti-social acts or the violation of social norms—that prove that he or she is not a person. A family may also regard an individual as "not correct" due to possession by spirits or cognitive impairment. An individual's status as a person is confirmed at their funeral and can result in either their elevation to ancestor status or the discovery of their (non-familial) spirit status—resulting in their burial away from the house within the bush. These notions of the house, personhood, and the central role of ancestors are essential to developing an understanding how the spirit child threatens the integrity of the house and challenges the notion of personhood.

The following chapter concerning divination takes our examination of the Nankani sociocultural world from a description of the immediate structure of the family and person to a description and analysis of how family members engage ancestors and make meaning of events shrouded in ambiguity. This examination will not only reveal more about family concerns and how they are resolved, but how through the divinatory process family members confront the world within and beyond the family's immediate boundaries.

CHAPTER 4

Transforming Ambiguity: Divination and the Creation of Meaning

Introduction and Background

Communities and peoples worldwide have practiced divination in one form or another at some point in time (Tetlock 2001:189, Peek 1991). At its most fundamental level, divination probes the inchoate or mysterious in an effort to acquire knowledge, validate understandings, make decisions, or imbue verdicts with authority (Mendonsa 1982, Peek 1991, Tetlock 2001). Divinatory styles, techniques, and principals are diverse. Although most forms of divination are grounded in the quest for knowledge, there is significant enough variation that any one theoretical or explanatory system cannot account for this diversity.

Divination has been a topic of anthropological description and analysis since Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1915). Many of the first analyses of divinatory practices were part of early African ethnographic scholarship under a structural-functionalist paradigm. This functionalism characterized divination and related practices as playing a significant role in maintaining social cohesiveness and stability, and the jural authority of elders and ancestors (cf., Evan-Pritchard, Fortes, Gluckman).

Despite anthropology's long-standing interest in divination, various scholars remain unimpressed with the theoretical and interpretive frameworks applied to divination (Winkelman & Peek 2004, Tetlock 2001, Peek 1991, Devisch 1985). At the theoretical level, the most prominent critiques address the positivistic traditions and the ways in which divination has been rationalized into strict evolutionist, ecological, or exacting functionalist paradigms (Tetlock 2001:194), some of which characterized divination as a "pre-scientific" epistemology. From an ethical and representational perspective, many of the early accounts of divination were prejudiced, narrow, misrepresentative, and lacked validity (Winkelman & Peek 2004).

The primary problem, according to Tetlock (2001) and Devisch (1985), is that scholars have tended to approach divination with preconceptions that fail to account for the subtle nuances, sociocultural dynamics, existential contexts, meaning production, and domains of "practical mastery" that exist beyond structural analysis of the objective realm (Devisch 1991, Tetlock 2001:195). Winkelman and Peek remark that the emic perspectives central to ethnographic work tend to not be considered seriously when examining divination, and that current interpretations do not accommodate recent paradigms shifts in anthropology (2004:4).

In many African cultures, divination systems are given a pivotal role within society and thus, according to Peek, "must assume a central position in our attempts to better understand African peoples today" (1991:2). Indeed, divination played a role in almost every major domain of my fieldwork, particularly in my investigations of decision-making, knowledge acquisition, and the spirit child. I devote this chapter to a close exploration of Nankani divination because it plays such a vital role in Nankani beliefs and practices. Specifically, divination is the primary tool families use to understand the intentions of ambiguous children—that is, children with physical or behavioral differences or children suspected of being "not for the family"—and is central to the spirit child diagnostic and decision-making process. Community members also assume diviners are primarily responsible for the diagnosis of spirit children, thus the secondary purpose of this chapter is to clarify the role that diviners and divination play in such decision-making. Finally, although some functionalist themes appear in the initial part of my description and analysis of divination, my analytic perspective is based on symbolic/interpretive, existential, and narrative approaches that are lacking in the existing literature.

Derived from interviews with diviners and residents, observation of divinatory sessions, learning and practicing divining, and a review of the existing literature, I describe the basic forms of divination, offer a description of why people divine, and describe how Nankani divination works from a practical perspective. I also describe how one becomes a diviner and examine what this process tells us about Nankani social structure. I illustrate how community members react to divination and conclude with an intersubjective narrative-based interpretation that emphasizes how divination influences how people act upon and how divination literally shapes their worlds.

Divinatory Categories

Devisch, in his summary of scholarly attempts to classify various forms of divination, notes that most classifications focus on "literal meanings of the divinatory language," a result of applying Euro-American positivist criteria. These classifications thus fail to account for divination's "symbolic character" (1985:51). Devisch's own categorizations, based on an extensive review of literature and his own fieldwork experiences, are comprehensive and widely regarded. He organized the variety of divinatory types into the three general categories: 1) Interpretive divination, which involves the diviner or client deciphering or decoding messages through the use or manipulation of symbolic divinatory objects or vehicles; 2) Mediumistic divination, which characterizes a wide range of appeals to "extra-human agencies" through various degrees of trance, disassociation, or possession or, in shamanistic traditions, "visionary contact" with such agents; and finally, 3) Mixed forms of divination, or oracular-interpretive divination, which involve elements of the previous two categories (Devisch 1985:51-52).

Nankani Divination

According to Devisch's categorization, Nankani divination is of the interpretive type. Fortes described Tallensi divination, which is similar, as a "sortilegious,"[8] objective, and technological type (1982). In the case of the Sisala, another closely-related group, Mendonsa described their divination as mechanical, quite opposite to the mental approaches characterized by trance and interpretative leeway (1982). Overall, these categorizations appear useful only as broad comparative tools.

Before making a detailed account of divination, it is necessary to clarify terms. In Nankana a diviner is called a *baga*, a shortened form of *bagadaana*. The English term used in Ghana is "soothsayer." Scholarly writers prefer the use of "diviner." For the purpose of this dissertation, I will use "diviner" when describing or speaking theoretically. In the context of local quotes or narratives, I will use "soothsayer." I refer to persons consulting diviners as "clients."

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[8] Divinatory techniques that produce a random outcome such as throwing dice or drawing lots.

In Nankani society, divination is one of the more important ritual institutions within the family lineage and the larger society in general. Due to its significant role within the various social domains of life, it is difficult to offer a succinct or narrow definition of Nankani divination. My extended definition is as follows.

Through the divinatory process, the head of the family lineage communicates with the ancestors to solve problems and seek explanations for events within the immediate family or larger clan. The process is, in part, a way to explain events through an inductive and narrative practice that uses available cultural symbols. Thus, the heads of families will divine to gain insight into or to clarify the origins of misfortunes such as illness or crop failure. Once the cause of misfortune is determined, ancestors are able to communicate through divination what redressive actions or sacrifices are necessary to placate or appease the ancestor responsible for causing the misfortune. Finally, divination plays a central role in uncovering the hidden and the dangerous. For example, divination may be used to find a spirit child hiding in the house or determine if someone is practicing sorcery against a family member.

Nsoh, an elder diviner, offers a perspective on his craft:

> The reason people soothsay is because they are having problems or troubles in the house. Maybe you raise fowls and you find that at the end of the day they all have died. Or you or your children are sick, or there are people dying in the house. So you are going to soothsay in order to know the reason why those things are happening and address them. Soothsaying connects you to your ancestors so you know about that problem.

Divination is significant at all levels of decision-making. Fortes accurately described it as a "ritual means of making a choice" (1966:413 in Jackson 1978:132). Divination plays a central role in family decision-making partly because ancestral authority backs decisions or outcomes of consultations. In theory, receiving ancestral guidance through divination eliminates any doubt surrounding a situation or one's judgment. In practice, however, I observed family members doubt ancestral proclamations and may visit another diviner to check their results. Family member may outright refuse to believe the results of some consultations because spirits, malicious ancestors, or other powers may be interfering with the process.

For those consulting diviners, divination offers insight into the future and can determine the gender of an unborn child, for instance. Through divination an individual hopes to ascertain what sacrifices might be necessary to gain ancestral protection from spirits or malicious persons. Nankani forms of divination are not a direct healing method, that is, diviners and the divination process is not thought to heal a person. Divination is believed to determine the cause of an illness (usually an ancestor), offer an explanation (the ancestor demands a sacrifice), and determine what actions are necessary to affect a cure, for example, the sacrifice of a fowl.

In summary, the following list, although not exhaustive, outlines the common issues the Nankani may bring to a diviner:

1. To determine if a woman can become pregnant.
2. To determine if a child "is for the family," and to determine its gender.
3. To determine a child's destiny and name.
4. To determine the cause of illness and the proper actions one should take to bring about its resolution.
5. To determine the cause of any other misfortunes that may strike a family or clan and what corrective actions are necessary.
6. To determine the proper sacrifices to make amends with the ancestors or to offer the ancestors thanks for a successful harvest.
7. To identify sorcerers, witches, and sources of enmity or jealously.
8. General decision-making; for example, to determine a good time to add a room to one's house or to travel.
9. To implicate family members engaging in antisocial acts.

Divination, Prayer, and Sacrifice

While sitting in the shade and chatting beneath a large baobab tree I asked Asorigiya if he "prayed" or spoke to the ancestors or God aloud or in his heart.

"What we know is about soothsaying," he replied. "If there is any problem within the family, we go and consult to identify what's happening. We don't know what it means to be worshiping or going to pray in churches. If there is anything, we go and soothsay."

I asked a similar question to Ayanobasiya.

"What we do," she replied, "is if there's a problem that someone is encountering, for example, in my case, my husband has to take that problem and find out why it's so. Is it because I've wronged this ancestor or that ancestor? For that, we go to the soothsayer's house to find out. If I've wronged an ancestor, they will figure out what I have to do to pay for that. But for me just to sit down and think about it, or say 'ancestor do this and that,' it's not the practice." She explained that the closest thing to prayer for a traditionalist is to sacrifice to an ancestor after visiting the diviner's house. I found that the invocations during these sacrifices are straightforward, pragmatic, and not couched in obscure or codified language.

While addressing the ancestors outside of a sacrificial context is uncommon, traditional family members are mindful of the implications of their actions on the ancestors and are persistently aware of the ancestral presence. Although ancestors do not live in the same world as humans, they are able to travel freely between worlds and observe their kin. When the ancestors wish to be heard, require a sacrifice, or are angry, they will communicate with family members by causing a misfortune. Misfortune is a message that something is amiss, requiring the family elder to return the "call" though divination, the only way to communicate directly with the ancestors. The local reasoning for this is quite pragmatic, as Fortes (1987) also identified: you cannot have a conversation with the ancestors outside of the divinatory context because they are dead.

Divination and Authority

Only the elder of each family has the authority to divine. Younger men will often accompany the elder to observe and learn. Younger men, women, and children of the household must divine through the family head. For example, if a child is sick, the mother will tell the head of the house what is happening and he will visit the diviner to determine the cause of the child's illness. Ayanobasiya's example above also illustrates how her husband must go and consult for her. Women can divine only in special cases, although most of the women I spoke with had no interest in divination and regarded such activities as men's work.

Those rare cases in which women have the authorization to divine shed light on elements of Nankani social structure. A woman can divine only when her house is in a dire situation. For example, a woman can become the symbolic head of the house if all the eligible men in the household have died and there are no remaining descendents. In this case, the eldest woman assumes male duties, including both ritual and jural activities as head of the house. Near the Kandiga area, the diviners told me that it was impossible for a woman to become a diviner. Near Sirigu, the diviners held that it was very rare but sometimes possible for a woman to become a diviner.

When examining the relationship between traditional power and authority structures, we see that junior men and women are subject to the control of elder males who are backed by ancestral authority. Divination can be perceived as one part of the larger patriarchal system that controls women's access to knowledge and decision-making power.

Although traditional individuals practice divination, the effects of divination influence Christians or Muslims. The religious composition of families is becoming increasingly heterogeneous, with younger generations converting to Catholicism, for example, and the older generations maintaining traditional beliefs. The family head still maintains a significant degree of decision-making power in families of mixed religious beliefs, although this may now be changing. The results of divinatory sessions and the decisions that they inform affect non-traditional family members since such individuals, by the structure and obligations inherent within the family system, remain subject to divinatory decisions by virtue of their membership in the family.

How to Divine

A man with a question or concern usually comes to the diviner's compound early in the morning and waits his turn outside the compound or, if the diviner is unoccupied, he enters the divination room located inside the family compound. He briefly greets the diviner and declares his intentions to divine by placing his offering of grain or money in a basket for the ancestors to recognize and accept. Initial interactions between the client and diviner tend to be formal. There is little conversation and, because "the man has come for something important," the often-elaborate morning greetings are limited.

Mendonsa describes a similar "ritual atmosphere" in his description of Sisala divination (1982:121). The atmosphere is indeed ritualistic but it is neither sacred nor solemn. Visiting friends or family members and children may interrupt divination sessions and in most cases these interruptions do not negatively affect the session.

The session begins when the diviner shakes his rattle (*sinyaka*) and calls upon his ancestors. "The sounds of the sinyaka," remarked one diviner, "are the sounds of the ancestors speaking. So when we shake it the ancestors come and take control of everything. They come to do the talking." Before shaking the sinyaka, some diviners will play a few notes on a small *kolego*, a local guitar made from a calabash, to attract the ancestors through music. The following is a quote from Asagabo, a middle-aged diviner, calling upon his ancestors at the beginning of a session:

> If you are around, listen to what he is saying. My ancestor, come and listen to what he is saying. Protect from sickness, protect from poverty of the land. You should not bring about quarreling. As you [ancestors] have come, as you have come, is there any bad thing, have you brought a bad thing, have you brought anything bad for the land? *Yaaba Nea* you should come and listen!

Within the divination room, four or more entities are thought of as involved in the divination process. The diviner calls upon his divining ancestors to facilitate communication with the client's ancestors. The client is involved and possibly the person he is representing. Hence, there are several intersubjective junctures or spaces at which messages are transmitted, constructed, and interpreted. An awareness of what is happening at these junctures is essential if we are to understand and interpret divinatory sessions (as observers).

Locally, the ancestors are regarded as having agency and subjectivity. During a divination session, ancestral agency and subjectivity emerge and the client must engage the intersubjective spaces that surface within the room in his process of developing a clear understanding of events and meanings. This will become clearer as we continue.

After summoning the ancestors, the diviner opens the *bakologo*, a goatskin bag with the various soothsaying objects, and empties a variety of items onto the floor. To an outsider, the bakologo, as Fortes described, initially looks "like a lot of odds and ends of rubbish" (1987:15, 1982). Although identifying it as "rubbish" is a strong choice of words, the *bakologo* indeed consists of an array of common everyday items, or *yale* (sn. *yaale*). Familiar objects include various animal bones or hides, a cow horn, seedpods, stones, pot fragments, shells, cloth, a section of rope, a lock, and old coins. The items in the bakologo are not sacred, hidden, fantastic, or unusual. Their meanings, when considered within the local sociocultural and ecological context, are a matter of common sense. Individuals unable to divine have little or no interest in discovering the symbolic meanings of the objects, though many community members can correctly guess an object's meaning. One may learn the symbolic meaning of all the items, sometimes ranging between 30 and 100 pieces, by observing one's father or clan elder divine and by asking the diviner the meanings of each.

The meanings associated with the yale are consistent across diviners in the area. All diviners have a set of standard or common items within their bakologo and several more unusual items that they may have acquired or been given. For example, one diviner had an empty tube of "Super Smile Toothpaste" with an image of a white family on the label. Although he could not read the label, the diviner told me that the object signified writing. Another bakologo contained part of a metal circuit board from a very old computer. It represented the zinc sheets used for roofing homes. Here are some common items with their meanings:

Mango Seed: Something sweet. Things will be good for you

Lock: Someone/something is preventing you from doing something.

Neck portion of a fowl: Speaking, or a voice.

Large leg bone or knee bone: *Yaaba* (ancestors). Various sizes represent differing degrees of ancestral distance

Rope: One's direct father

Seed: One's direct mother

Small gourd for drinking: Woman

Tortoise shell (complete or fragment): Water (coolness) and health. Things will be fine.

Large snail shell: Although someone has done something to you, or you have been harmed, do not retaliate or you will be harmed again.

Part of a donkey tail attached to a handle: Juju or sorcery powers that can protect you
Elephant tooth: Powerful and strong
Dog jawbone: People are laughing at you, or you don't want them to laugh at you
Chicken or goat foot/hoof: Have to offer a chicken or goat as sacrifice
Hedgehog skin: Represents there is trouble coming your way
Kariga tree seed pod: Sickness
Round black stone: Death (combined with the kariga it means sickness resulting in death)
Millet husk: Food
Red cloth: Sickness or danger/warning
A stone with many colors: Something that you cannot identify or be sure about
Dog skull: Your name will be popular
A type of seedpod that is impossible to open: Something is hidden

Various gestures are also used, for example, pointing to the floor or earth indicates the gods of the land or tingane shrine. Pointing to body parts is also significant. Clients may also bring outside items that they wish to use to check the divination process, or help resolve questions that they have in mind. I found the meanings to be similar to and comparable to Fortes' list of "code objects" (1987:19).

After the summoning the ancestors and randomly arranging the yale, the diviner produces two smooth and relatively flat stones and wets one side of each stone by spitting on them. To determine if the ancestors are listening, he casts the stones into a tortoise shell and reads the three possible outcomes. If one wet and one dry side are facing upward, the ancestors are listening or have accepted. Two dry sides indicate that the ancestors are refusing to talk with the client. Two wet sides indicate that the ancestors are "laughing at you" or can hear you but are unwilling to respond at that moment. It can also mean that the ancestors are pleased, that something good will happen to you, or that either an ancestor or someone somewhere is causing problems for you. If the ancestors are laughing or if they refuse, the stones are recast or appeals made asking the ancestors to reconsider. If the ancestors are laughing or refusing, the client may also address the reason for the ancestor's laughter or refusal before he raises his reason for coming to consult. The ancestors are rarely unavailable. When unavailable, they simply require added encouragement to agree to talk. When the ancestors are adamant in their refusal, it is often indicative that someone in the family has just died.

The client and diviner, usually sitting directly across from each other, will now take hold of the bakoldoore, the divination stick. The bakoldoore, a 24-inch stick, sometimes with a forked top and with metal fixed to the other end, is the primary means by which the ancestors identify the yale and direct the client's interpretation. The bakoldoore comes from a root of a sacred tree and can be replaced if the diviner feels it to be inadequate. The bakoldoore "is like a magnet," said one diviner. "It is the thing that will see that this or that is the problem and it will be attracted to that thing [bakoldoore]." The diviner lightly grasps the top of the bakoldoore and client lightly holds the base with the tips of his fingers rather than in his fist. During my own first experiences with divining, I aggressively held and attempted to overpower the bakoldoore. "You don't hold the bakoldoore firmly," a diviner instructed. "It's always loose so that the bakologo gods will direct it to the items. If you hold it firmly, it means that the man is doing it from his own mind, not from the ancestors."

Thus a firm grip is discouraged and a sign of an inexperienced client, since it often results in the client overpowering the ancestral forces working on the stick.

After calling the ancestors and with the bakoldoore in hand, the diviner shakes the sinyaka and the divination session begins. In the ritual's most basic form, the client asks the ancestors questions. The questions must be clear and direct. A diviner told me that, when someone is learning divination "the question, what you are saying, should be straightforward, otherwise the ancestors will not understand." The ancestor responds to questions by directing the bakoldoore to touch specific yale and the client interprets and narrates these symbolic responses.

The divination progresses according to each client's style. Most clients will divine verbally, voicing their questions, asking for confirmation, and speaking the ancestor's responses in a dialogue-like manner. The diviner does not narrate or speak for the ancestors. For example, during a session a client will ask an ancestor, "Shall I make a sacrifice? If yes, you tell me." The bakoldoore responds by digging through the yale and repeatedly touching a fowl's leg. The client narrates the ancestor's response, "Yes, sacrifice a fowl." Some clients divine quietly or silently to themselves and others adopt a style between the two.

I provide a translated excerpt from an 80-minute divination session I observed with a field assistant. In this example, the client narrates the process and his interpretations. We see that the client is concerned about what others are saying regarding his new metal roof. He is also concerned about offering a sacrifice to an ancestor, and about a theft. As mentioned above, the client narrates his questions and the ancestral response, much like a conversation. It may be difficult to follow what is happening, even for locals familiar with divination, as the local idioms and references are complex and personal.

During this session, the diviner is shaking the sinyaka, humming, singing, and occasionally calling out when answers are found, or as he described it, when things "get hot." The diviner is sitting on a short stool and is facing to the side, looking away from the client and the yale as he holds the top of the bakoldoore. Neither the diviner nor the client is in a trance-like state, although the diviner focuses on the rhythm of the sinyaka.

Client: You shouldn't feel shy.
You should come out and speak.
Is it that you are scared, or is somebody complaining?
Is somebody sitting somewhere and complaining?
Is it at the tingane [tree shrines], or is it at a different place?

Ancestor: I have come.
Have you brought something? A problem to discuss?

Client: What is the talk about?
What is the talk about?
What is the talk about?
What is the talk about?
If it's the metal [roofing], is it on the tingane side?

Ancestor: It is metal at the tingane side.
What is the problem?
Will we now hear about it?

Client: It is the metal.

Ancestor: Agreed.
Somebody hasn't understood
Understood.
They will laugh at somebody.
They will also reveal the secret of somebody.

Client: You shouldn't let me suffer.
Adoko and I will get you a fowl.
We have a dog!
That is what you are saying.
I want to greet you, I want to thank you.

Ancestor: You should get a fowl.

Client: Is it [sacrifice] to be in the morning or the evening?

Ancestor: Have you called the people and they refuse?
Have you called the people and they refuse?

Client: I called them and they refused.
Is it because of the metal that I am crying?
Or is it the ancestors?
Or is it about the girl [his daughter] that I am crying?

Ancestor: It's about the metal going to the house.

You are not able to sacrifice to the ancestors.
You should use the fowl to sacrifice to the ancestors.

Client: What about the metal?
Is it someone that has come to fight with other people?

Ancestor: That is what has come.
It has come to the house.
It's having tongues, someone has come to fight.
It has to go out.

Client: You are the dead and you are talking.
You have spoken with my ancestors, the tingane, and you have won the case.
The bad thing, are you a bad thing?
Or is it somebody living with my ancestors?

Ancestor: It is a bad thing.
You should run and go and catch your ancestor.

Client: Who is turning his back like that?

Ancestor: It is a thief.

Client: Does the tingane know about him?

Ancestor: He knows about him.

Client: Why has he allowed him to come to bring about that?

Ancestor: You should go to the ancestors,

> Go to the tingane and understand the case.
> Understand why they allow it to link with the tingane.
> You should go to the ancestor's house, enter there, and speak to Atanga.

The most intelligible concerns in this "dialogue" are the client's search for why people were talking about him behind his back. In this community, people know that the client is not well off, and could not afford metal roofing. However, his sons recently helped him put a zinc roof on his room within the family compound. Since metal roofing is expensive, others might be speculating that he employed witchcraft or sorcery to purchase it.

A brief discussion of the remainder of this divination session as it proceeded from the above excerpt may further illustrate the content and mechanics of the divination process. The consultation shifted to an attempt to resolve the ancestor's grievance at the client's refusal to sacrifice a dog in exchange for the ancestor protecting him and his family from misfortune. The ancestor stated that he had done everything to prevent the client or anyone else in the client's house from becoming sick, and even protected the client during arguments. As the ancestor persisted, the bakoldoore began moving erratically and pointing at random objects that were of no concern to the client or the ancestor.

The erratic message, for the client, was confusing. He attempted to clarify the situation "Should I give the sacrifice to the ancestor himself, or to the tingane?" he asked. When there was no coherent response the client became concerned that the ancestor had left the session. "Is it the ancestor talking? he asked. "Or is the tingane talking?"

The reply came: "It is the tingane." However it was not clear which clan ancestor was now talking. The client attempted to ask if it was the Kandiga tingane or one somewhere else, but the bakoldoore continued to jump around erratically. The client abandoned the bakoldoore and asked the diviner to cast the stones to determine what was happening.

The diviner took two smooth stones, wet one side of each with saliva and cast them into the shell. They landed closed, or both wet sides down. The meaning: People somewhere on this earth were laughing at him (meaning they were talking about him).

"Is it the people from Kandiga here, or from somewhere else?" the client asked. The stones were cast again. One wet, one dry. The ancestors would not tell.

Satisfied with their refusal, he picked up his end of the bakoldoore and continued to consult, discovering that the people "laughing" at him wanted to cause problems for him or his clan. He followed up by asking if his ancestors would allow his enemies to reach him. There was no clear answer; the ancestor was avoiding the question. At this point, the focus of the session shifted when the ancestor directed the end of the bakoldoore to my leg and so I was drawn into the session. The consultation continued and an unknown ancestor, either his or my own, questioned if I had offered a proper sacrifice to the tingane where I lived and if I had provided a fowl as a gift to my landowner. I replied that I had not, and the session continued by outlining the socially correct procedures I must follow.

From my perspective during the consultation, the client's key areas of concern came and went and faded in and out of focus. For example, he or the ancestors would often jump from concerns about the appropriate type of sacrifice to an entirely new topic, without an apparent resolution of the previous issue. The session was difficult to follow, as it did not have a linear progression nor was it based on a direct question-answer format. Both my assistants also found it difficult to unpack the meanings during this as well as other sessions. Not only was the structure difficult to follow, but the content was personal and couched within the client's familial context. Not all divination sessions, however, shift topics this rapidly.

Analysis of Nankani Divination

Becoming a Diviner: Matrilateral Ancestors and Submerged Sources of Power

A man describes how he discovered he was destined to become a diviner:

> When my father gave birth to me I was the ugliest person among his sons, but I was able to marry two wives and have five children. However, one wife died. The other, when giving birth a year later, also died. The boys

> grew up and married, but their wives gave birth and the children died. The children did not live long. One of the children was sent out to watch the animals. When he came back we found that his whole body was hot. It was around evening time when he died. My family went to the soothsayer's house and found that these things were happening because I was supposed to be a soothsayer and refused. That is why those things were happening to me. Because of that, I agreed to become a soothsayer. So they came and performed the ceremony. As of now, everything is fine. I don't have a wife, but my children have married and given birth and they are all in the house.

This man's story illustrates how a series of personal misfortunes signaled and compelled him to accept his ancestrally determined obligation to become a diviner. Other diviners described a similar course. Asaah told me how he had been a successful businessperson trading livestock in Accra. Despite his business success, he suffered from health complaints, and all five of his children died within a week of their birth. After the death of his fifth child, Asaah describes how his wife also became ill. They went to a diviner and determined that a matrilateral ancestor in the family wanted him to become a diviner. Asaah refused to believe that proclamation. Soon his wife's condition worsened and she showed no signs of improvement. His family members insisted that he accept his calling. He agreed and his wife quickly recovered. He now has three wives and many healthy children.

A person is not born a diviner, nor does he choose it as a career option later in life. As the two previous stories show, a man's matrilateral ancestors call him, usually by sending misfortune, to enter service. If a man intentionally or unintentionally ignores this calling, the ancestor will continue to lash out and eventually kill him if he does not accept. For other ethnic groups throughout northern Ghana, shrines are believed to commonly signal their desire to be inherited by the ancestral transmission of sickness or death (Mendonsa 1982:97, Fortes 1949).

If a person accepts his fate to become a diviner, it is necessary for him to travel to his "mother's land," to collect the shrine, undergo the necessary ritual, and receive the authorization to divine. Although the majority of ancestral shrines descend from the paternal side of the family, the divination shrine and bakologo ancestors are matrilateral. A diviner describes the shrine:

> The divining ancestor is an old woman that has died. The shrine represents the old woman. She has certain things that she wants. When the old woman comes to this earth, I have to give those things to her. When people come to soothsay they also have to give things to her so they will be able to soothsay properly. The old woman has come back in the form of the bakologo, if there is a problem in the community she'll be able to solve it.

The bakologo shrine is kept within the diviner's room. The specific bakologo ancestor the shrine embodies is usually a very distant grandmother, four or more generations previous. Often the diviner's father, if also called as a diviner, may have held the same shrine.

I was intrigued that a female ancestor played a dominate role in communicating with a person's paternal ancestors, particularly in a context within which women are excluded from divining. This anomaly appears to arise from the need to recognize and maintain social networks with one's matrilateral kin due to an emphasis placed on the patrilineal line (Fortes 1949). Mendonsa also highlights the importance of acquiring a matrilaterally-related shrine to establish a formalized relationship with that side of the family. When one enters into a relationship with a sorcery or divination shrine, one is also entering into a relationship with the group that owns the shrine (Mendonsa 1982:97). I now elaborate upon how the matrilateral bakologo complex highlights the powers associated within the kinship structures.

Fortes' description of the bakologo shrine views the matrilateral influence primarily from a psychoanalytic perspective. He describes how the "mother" shrines are substantially more vindictive and persecutory in the misfortunes they send when compared to male shrines. As in *The Web of Kinship Among the Tallensi*, he describes how the mother shrine will intervene "relentlessly" in a man's life until he "submits" to it (Fortes 1949:325). Fortes finds that the maternal shrines are objects wherein men project "deeper feelings of guilt and insecurity largely on to the mother image." Through the ritual of sacrifice, this guilt is relieved, "hate is transformed into love," and one's persecutor becomes one's benefactor (1949:325). However, this relationship with the mother figure can quickly sour if one's ritual obligations are not met.

Turner (1969) takes this mode of analysis further, offering an interpretation of the female bakologo and its matrilateral relationship to the man as representing the "submerged" and jurally weaker side of kinship. The shrine is symbolic of the larger differences and tensions between patrilineal and matrilateral kinship obligations and bonds, particularly the psychic tension produced as individuals are pulled between the structural (associated with the patrilineal) and the communitarian (matrilateral) morals within the society (1969:115). Where Fortes (1949) sees the mother-like bakologo shrine functioning as a projective mechanism, Turner proposes an interpretation of the shrine as representing not merely a personal or spiritual tie, but the broader social ties of "communitas countering the cleavages of structure" (1969:118).

I observed similar elements within my work with the Nankani and indeed their social structure is similar to the Tallensi. Turner's (1969) patrilineal/matrilateral – dominant/submerged dichotomy is useful but stops before examining the power relationships present within and between the patrilineal and matrilateral sides. As discussed earlier, the patrilineal rights and responsibilities are institutionally structured and the individual is bound to the larger social ties within his or her clan. While the patrilineal side is characterized by structure and institutional power, the matrilateral side holds a different sort of power: freedom from the determinant patrilineal structure.

A stated in the previous chapter, Mathew described how a man's power and strength lies within his maternal uncle's house. "You can go to your uncle's house and do anything," he said. "Within your father's house you don't have that." I found that this matrilateral power exists within two domains: First, as Mathew described, power as the freedom to move and act outside of the clan's structural and jural constraints. Second, spiritually related powers are transmitted matrilaterally. For example, one inherits witchcraft as well as the bakologo powers from one's mother. These two powers, although submerged, are destructive enough to threaten the integrity of the paternal side and, as we will see throughout this dissertation, threats to the integrity of the patrilineal boundaries are a serious concern for families.

Turner's clever use of the term "submerged" to describe the matrilateral side was, I assume, chosen with intent. It is not that the matrilateral side has less power, or that power and forms of social control are non-existent. It is that conceptions of matrilateral powers are often hidden, concealed, or "submerged," as opposed to the more visible structure of patrilineal sources of power. The tensions associated with these submerged dimensions of power are not only illustrated within Fortes' guilt-based psychodynamic explanation of the "bakologo complex," but also present within the witchcraft and spirit child suspicions and discourse.

Initiation

A bakologo shrine does not usually call a man until he is, at a minimum, a young adult, but more commonly when he reaches middle age. I did not encounter a diviner younger than 40 years of age and those in their fifties had only been practicing for less than ten years. After the ancestors call a man to become a diviner, the candidate must perform particular sacrifices, offer gifts to the family where the specific maternal shrine resides, and participate in an initiation ceremony. The process may take several years and involve the gifting of several animals from the candidate to the family.

When the requisite number of gifts and time have passed, sometimes up to five years, the man undergoes an initiation ceremony. During the ceremony the candidate must pass a test to determine if the ancestors are with him and that he truly has divinatory powers. The central part of the ceremony involves giving the diviner a herbal concoction and significant amounts of the local beer, called *pito*, to make him fall asleep. As he sleeps, he is covered with a blanket, fowls are sacrificed, and family members hide common objects, often animal bones, in the surrounding area. "When I awoke," a diviner recalls, "I was able to use the bakoldoore to locate all the things they hid. So because of that, they know that I'm the right person to do the soothsaying work."

These descriptions illustrate two important elements in becoming a diviner.

First, the candidate offers gifts to recognize, establish, and formalize the relationship between his patrilineal clan and himself and his matrilateral family. An element of the exchange, particularly the gifting of fowls and the accumulation and gifting of animals, is similar to what a man will do when courting a woman he wants to marry. I am not referring here specifically to the bride wealth, but to the fact that bestowing of gifts upon the matrilateral family to gain the female bakologo shrine resembles the material and symbolic exchanges characteristic of the courtship process. In both cases, an important woman within the family is being relocated within a different lineage.

Second, the initiation process highlights the importance of gaining the ability or power to access the hidden or concealed. At a manifest level, we see how the object-finding trial is symbolic of the responsibilities of divination: accessing or clarifying the hidden, the unknown, or the inchoate. At a deeper level, we see on one hand how the "submerged" dimensions of the maternal side are closely associated with witchcraft and the unseen. On the other hand, we see that divination involves accessing or clarifying these hidden elements. During the trial, the matrilateral family members not only hide objects from the new diviner, but also bestow upon the diviner the ancestral powers to see and uncover them. Those that are associated with the hidden also bestow the capability to see. This hidden-revealed or causative-curative contradiction also appears within the notions witchcraft. Those that have the power to see and uncover witches (*soputo*) are themselves witches who use their powers for good. The soputo receive their powers from the same place as other witches, that is, from their mother.

The Public Response to Divination

Winkelman and Peek remark that there has been limited scholarly investigation of divination and that, as a result, divination practices have been marginalized or misrepresented as tools employed by "charlatans" to manipulate their communities (2004:3). Not only do some scholars regard divination with suspicion, some community members are also ambivalent about it, expressing uncertainties regarding the validity of the claims associated with it and the authority invested in it. Part of the misunderstanding surrounding divination stems from both community members' and scholars' incomplete understanding of what exactly is happening in the diviner's room. I was surprised that despite the prominent role that divination played within Nankani society, few community members had any idea how it worked.

This lack of knowledge and the misunderstandings concerning divination makes more sense when we consider that, although divination remains a powerful force in many families, social changes are taking place in the region that are reducing people's exposure to divination, changes such as education, modernization, migration to urban areas, and conversions to Christianity or Islam. The older men who divine and the younger men who take an interest in divination are the only persons aware of its intricacies. The limited exposure that others receive occurs through observing divination at funerals, although few people closely observe these divination sessions.

I was always intrigued with the responses I would receive from friends and other community members when I told them that I was going to divine. Common reactions were, "Don't go! They only tell lies." Or, "They just want your money!" After warning me, some might launch into statements informed only by second-hand information and rumor about what diviners *really do*.

There are three common misconceptions. The first misconceptions posits that the diviners are simply making things up or telling lies. The justification behind this is that there is no possible way that they could be communicating with the dead. The second misconception is that the diviner is manipulating the client as part of an elaborate scheme to make money or get food. The third misconception is that the diviner is manipulating the outcome of the session by speaking for the ancestors and telling the client what to do, or forcefully directing the bakoldoore. All of these misconceptions attribute more agency and power to the diviner than he really has.

It is worth stating explicitly that diviners play little role in the interpretive process and that they are not making things up. If a client is learning how to divine the diviner may assist the new client with remembering the meanings of the items, but they do not develop the narrative nor do they speak for the ancestors.

In addition to observing them in practice, I asked all the diviners I encountered if they ever knew what a client was coming to consult about or if a client ever told them before a consultation why they came. Not one diviner indicated that they knew anything in advance or what was on the client's mind. At the most, one diviner remarked, a diviner might know about the troubles affecting the individual through community rumor. But such information, I was told, cannot affect divination. Additionally, my description of the mechanics of a divination session illustrate how the client and diviner exchange little more than the obligatory greetings before a session, and during the divination the diviner is either much too engaged in shaking of the sinyaka or is facing away from the client and the yale.

As a diviner remarked, "I will not know the things that people soothsay for. Some of the good diviners may understand a little, but they will not know exactly what it's about." Another stated, "It is only the person who has come to consult who knows. The fellow that is consulting, is always talking with the bakoldoore, 'Is it this? Is it that?' Only he knows. So he can finish the session and I will not even know what he has come for. It's only the man consulting who will know what he is doing."

Other diviners told me that even if they had the ability to control the divination sessions, they often do not know what the client is consulting about due to the often cryptic and personal nature of the client's utterances, the random, nebulous, or tangential narrative structure, or the fact that some clients consult in silence. In Sierra Leone, Kuranko diviners also deny taking into account local knowledge (Jackson 1978). This is unlike Evans-Pritchard's description of Zande witch doctors use of local scandals (1972), or Turner's account of Ndembu diviners using knowledge of local events within the community to determine a diagnosis (Jackson 1978:128).

Finally, there was significant speculation as to who was really directing or controlling the bakoldoore. All diviners denied controlling where the stick landed. To prove his point, one diviner mentioned that there are blind diviners. "How are they going to direct you?" he asked. "The stick itself directs. I have no hand in it." The issues surrounding the control of the stick are remarkably similar to debates in North America surrounding the use of ouija boards, where two or more people use an indicator to point to letters and numbers on a flat surface spelling out messages said to be from spirits or the dead. The questions concerning the ouija board frequently center on who is pushing or controlling the indicator, much like the bakoldoore. Is it the spirits? Or the imperceptible nudges from the participants? Diviners consistently emphasized their role as being mechanical. For example, one man remarked that the ancestors are speaking through him with the bakoldoore. "It is just like a shadow that goes out, you will not see it, but it goes around in the spirit world and gathers the information and comes back. Even I don't know what's happening."

Through my interviews, experiences, and observations, I conclude that diviners do not lie to clients, as they are not offering advice. They are not solely in control of the bakoldoore. They do not make things up. Additionally, because the gifts given in exchange for a consultation are small, divination is not a major source of income for most diviners, who are all farmers as well. Many community members perceive diviners as telling their clients that they have a spirit child, or that the spirit child is a result of the diviners "telling lies." The insights explained above indicate how this is not possible.

With these clarifications in place, we might ask why these rumors and speculations surrounding divination abound? As I previously suggested, these misconceptions may arise in part because much of divination is not accessible to most people. Few people in the community, particularly those who live within more urban areas, such as Bolgatanga, have had contact with diviners or divination. The majority of divination is not accessible to the public. I'm not suggesting that it is intentionally hidden, rather that it remains an activity that is not immediately visible or accessible. The hidden element, the lack of understanding surrounding divination, its importance in decision-making, and the fact that people seek to contact spirits and ancestors during sessions generates an ideal environment for rumor and speculation.

Divination, Psychotherapy, Anxiety

It seems that no scholarship on divination is complete without a discussion concerning its psychotherapeutic parallels. However, most psychotherapeutic comparisons are in reference to forms of mediumistic divination such as possession, rather than interpretive divination. Mediumistic comparisons often describe how the process of becoming a diviner is a way for "mentally ill" individuals to redefine themselves or play a role in society. Devisch lists several scholars who have explored how various mediumistic forms of divination are therapeutic, remarking that it is a form of psychodrama that "enables the patient to reassume social responsibility in a recovered identity" (1985:56). Discussion of psychotherapeutic dimensions of interpretive forms of divination is less common. In the one analysis concerning an interpretive form of divination that makes such parallels, Bohannan (1975) described diviners using divining-chains to facilitate the emergence of feelings into consciousness, a technique that is similar to the psychoanalytic method of free-floating attention (in Tedlock 2001:193), or a form of active listening.

I am unable to make any claims that divination is a way for Nankani diviners suffering from mental illness to assume an appropriate social role. However, it *is* a way for individuals to understand why they have been subject to excessive misfortune and adjust their lives accordingly by adopting a new identity in light of their misfortunes and change in their social role (recall that ancestors call diviners to the profession through misfortune). In contrast, divination's therapeutic value for a client experiencing the Euro-American notion of mental illness is doubtful. If divination has any therapeutic value for clients, it lies in helping people make meaning, narrate, and organize experience, rather than in a curative psychological intervention.

The dominant approach to divination has been to examine its role within the larger social system. Anthropologists addressing divination in northern Ghana (Fortes, Goody, Mendonsa) focused on how the divination maintains the stability of society, rather than elaborating on its impact on individual experience. Mendonsa highlights how the divinatory process renders secret occult forces known, "clarifies emotions, interpersonal tensions, and social conflicts within the group" (1982:89). Although symbolic interactionist in his approach, Mendonsa's perspective is based in the Manchester School's functionalist-oriented interpretations, which conceptualize divination as a way to sustain social stability and authority, or resolve tension and conflict (Devisch 1985:57).

The emphasis placed on socially oriented approaches to divination is understandable, considering that local notions of the individual person are not atomistic but frequently include the larger social group. We may however be missing something by not developing a complete consideration of the subjective experiences and the effects of divination on the individual within this larger social context. The remainder of this chapter will deal with selected dimensions of divination and the individual.

As divination has been compared to psychotherapy, so the early literature on the impact of divination on the individual tended to characterize its potential to reduce anxiety. Comparisons that were often couched in stereotypes of irrationality suggested that divination was "granted inappropriate worth by a credulous and anxiety-ridden people" (Peek 1991:3). Others, moving away from "anxiety" characterizations, depicted it as a way to provide *relief* from uncertainty, offer direction (Heinze 2004, Winkelman and Peek 2004:15), or *cope* with an unpredictable environment (Fortes 1987:6).

During my conversations with soothsayers, we would discuss the emotional dimensions of soothsaying. Nankani diviners remarked that people felt better after they divined. "People will come and look sad," one told me. "At the end, their faces, the way they look, it seems that they have found something good. They will have a good face." Fortes also described that a man principally goes to a diviner because he is "worried," or "has something on his mind" and that once the man knows who and what is working against him his "anxiety is allayed" (1987:14). Another Nankani diviner provides a detailed description:

> When the fellow comes you'll see that he is frowning. So you know that there is something that angers him, something that disturbs him. From there, immediately, when he is leaving, his face won't be bad again. The fellow has found an answer. When he is able to perform the sacrifices and the misfortunes are able to stop, when he comes back to soothsay again you will see him smiling.

It is important to contextualize the use of terms related to or characterized as "anxiety" and "worry." However, without a thorough ethnopsychological understanding of the Nankani people it is difficult to determine if their subjective experiences bear a resemblance to ours or if they can be mapped upon our categorizations and understandings of the world. I am confident however that local notions of "anxiety" are not a pathological state, but a mode of "Being"—or even a requirement of being-in-the-world.

For comparison: In a typical Euro-American context, individuals are often described as striving to construct and live within a predictable world, attempting to minimize anxiety, disruption, misfortune, and the unknown. What many do not recognize is the fact that these uncertainties in life are inescapable. Kleinman (2006) argues that we nonetheless attempt to avoid situations that may result in anxious dispositions, and if we cannot avoid such states, or happen to experience them in chronicity, pathology may result.

My sense is that anxiety in northern Ghana is remarkably different from Euro-American understandings. It is not that Nankani people do not experience anxiety and tension. They do. But misfortune, danger, the unknown, and other unpleasantries are an expected and more openly recognized part of human experience. In northern Ghana there is less emphasis on avoiding anxiety or anxious states, and more acceptance that misfortune happens. Given this rudimentary ethnopsychological understanding, we can see how Euro-American emotional constructs and therapeutic approaches may not closely correspond to the subjective, anxiety-lessening effects of divination. For the Nankani, divination is more a mundane necessity. Whether there is a Euro-American "therapeutic" or healing outcome is not necessarily a local concern, the post-divinatory smiles notwithstanding.

Working on the World: Transference, Narrative, and Intersubjective Meaning

I conclude this chapter with an examination of how divination helps people understand and render the human experience meaningful. Such a person-centered perspective may provide a welcome addition to the standard functionalist analogies. I accomplish this by bringing my previous description and interpretation together to illustrate the themes of intersubjectivity, the role of transference, and the narrative-based creation of meaning in divination.

At its core, intersubjectivity focuses our attention on the ways in which people share experiences and meanings. It is a field of "inter-experience, inter-action, and inter-locution," that lies between subjects (Jackson 1998:3). Intersubjectivity helps us account for a dialectical relationship or interplay between "empirical persons, endowed with consciousness and will," which can include other people, ancestors, or even objects (Jackson 1998:6-7). An examination of intersubjective relationships, consequently, is not necessarily bound to an analysis of two separate subjectivities, or two living people. Rather, it includes not only material objects charged with subjective meanings, but also spirits and ancestors and subjects of our thinking, as the notion of Being is not strictly limited to the realm of the living (Jackson 1998:9).

Through the narratives that constitute Nankani divination, the client actively engages an intersubjective space in what initially appears to be a dyadic relationship with his ancestors in the negotiation of meaning. However, as Jackson notes, drawing upon the work of Sartre and Simmel, such a dyadic relationship necessitates an external mediator. Whether that mediator is a third party or a shared idea, it is necessary for the creation of meaning (1998:9). In the Nankani divination process we see such a triad at work. In this intersubjective triad the central dyad is the client and his ancestors, and the necessary mediator is the diviner. I highlight the role of each of these players in the production of meaning.

Numerous scholars refer to the phenomenon of transference as a central mechanism within the diviner-client relationship, particularly its role in promoting strong relationships and healing (Winkelman and Peek 2004, Peek 1991, Jackson 1978, Devereux 1967). Recognition of the transference process is central to many forms of psychotherapy. At its fundamental psychotherapeutic level, transference is the redirection or attribution onto a therapist of feelings a patient has regarding another person. The feelings redirected by the patient are often manifest or unconscious feelings concerning important relationships experienced during childhood, namely the relationship with one's parents. The literature on the transference process in divination highlights the role of the transfer of feelings between the diviner and client and their relationship. However, the literature does not elaborate on the role or influence of the client's ancestors and childhood experiences in this process, which is at the heart of the transference process.

Within Nankani divination, a transference relationship between client and diviner is not immediately apparent, and may not exist at all. Although clients do form friendships with diviners (as with any other community member), the therapeutic process and client-healer relationship characterizing other forms of divination, typically involving diagnostic healing or ritual performance, are not prominent. The absence or low levels of transference between Nankani clients and diviners is due to the diviner taking less of an interpretive and counseling role and functioning primarily as an intermediary for the ancestors; that is, the role of mediator in the intersubjective triad.

While the diviner merely facilitates this process, the ancestors play a more significant role as the transference object for clients. Namely, as the locus of the client's transference of parental related sentiments and themes. Evidence for this transference relationship is based upon the client-ancestor focus during divination; the serious nature of the ancestrally directed content; the presence of filial piety as the bridge between parents and children and its role as a model relationship between the living and ancestors (Fortes 1949:176); and, the strong authoritative and fatherly position of the ancestors.

My depiction of the transference relationship is strengthened by Fortes' remark that "all ancestors are projections of parents" (1949:176). But the process is one of transference, not simply projection. Projection is an element of transference, but transference is not all projection. Specifically, the human-ancestor relationship goes beyond the projection or externalization of the symbolic manifestations of emotional states, since the expression of the central symbolic themes characterizing parent-child relationships is fundamental to the divinatory process. The ancestors are not parents, but they represent the idealized notion of parents and are interacted with as such. Much of the satisfaction and frustration experienced in the course of divination and the narrative and meaning-making that results, is the effect of a transference relationship with the ancestors.

The mechanical and structural elements of divination, together with the subjective experiences, meanings, transference, and symbolism that arise within the intersubjective triad, coalesce into an objective and cohesive interpretation of experiences and events. While transference strongly influences a client's interpretive process, directing his attention to idealized parental notions that are also socially grounded, the central element or mechanism in this process is the narrative.

When I speak of the narrative, I refer not only to a product or a story about the world, but also to the client's process of verbally or non-verbally talking through their concerns vis-à-vis the ancestral pronouncements. This process is expressed through the exegesis of symbolic objects (yale) and the objective trials (throwing the stones). As the client generates a narrative, the questions, experiences, and family issues that arise are understood in reference to ancestral demands, social influences, moral understandings or, in the broadest terms, the opportunities and constraints dictated by his sociocultural world.

In this narrative process, we also see the interplay between a person's experiences of social structure and the limited number of ways to act within that world. We see how a person exerts his or her influence to mediate the difference between what is desired and what is given (Jackson 2005), between that person's lived experience and expectations on the one hand and the greater social reality on the other.

The narrative process, involving both the emplotment and reemplotment of experience, allows the client to uncover the "hidden" and to organize, narrate, and control events and experiences, rendering the unknown, inchoate, or frustrating into something tangible and understood. It works to direct and organize attention, particularly in relation to the larger social world as represented and organized by the symbolic objects. Most importantly, the narrative is central to divination's potential to "make meaning" and work on the world. In its transformative respects, divination not only changes people's perception of how events are unfolding, but also authorizes the individual or family members to take action, to rectify a mistake, and to act on the world.

Nankani divination is the basis for the intersection and integration of the social, political, cultural, and subjective. While many scholars view divination as central to the maintenance of social order, few describe how the person comes to interpret and act on that order. By applying this person-focused interpretation onto the larger social context, I posit that the divination process is a dialectic between an individual's subjective experience of the world and sense of identity on the one hand, and the social limits and definition of experience on the other (see close similarity to Burton's description of the dialectic, 1991:43). This dialectic draws attention to adaptation in social relationships and redefines the context of social life (Burton 1991:43).

Despite my analysis, the most important reason why divination is practiced is because it works (cf. Winkelman & Peek 2004:7, Jackson 1978). When asked about what they do, diviners do not talk about relieving anxiety and facilitating the narrative of a client's experience, they pragmatically reply that they are simply there to help people. Although tautological, divination works because divination helps people. As important as it may be to theorize about divination, we cannot allow theoretical interpretations to narrow, diminish, or obscure this essential and most important dimension.

Local Concerns, Local Solution

I have showed how divination could transform people's experience of the world by affecting how they frame, narrate, and confront issues in their lives. In the following vignette, I provide a reflexive account of how divination "worked" on my world.

The sociocultural, ecological, and political realities of people's worlds foster unique sets of concerns and imperatives that direct their attention to locally determined domains of importance. Such concerns and modes of attention constitute a significant part of their worldview. For anthropologists, long-term participant-observation provides a window into how people understand and make meaning within their world. Over the course of ethnographic research, what may initially seem strange becomes clear as experiences reveal the deeper context in which particular events occur.

As most ethnographers can attest, during the initial phases of fieldwork, one regards certain experiences, traditional practices, and themes with a degree of basic unfamiliarity or strangeness. This was certainly the case for me. Various cultural practices and behaviors struck me, for example, I was fascinated by how "eating" extended beyond what I considered standard modes of consumption. I had conversations with people who described how the truck "chopped" (ate) oil, how the metal hinge chopped at the bracket, how the government official was chopping funds from the grant, and how witches are always looking for human souls to catch and eat. "Chopping" is not all bad; in fact, it also used to refer to the good things in the world. Hence, a good spirit child is a *sisgio ditigo*, or spirit child eating. Later, I began to incorporate these notions of consumption into my own understanding of the world and recognized them as being effective ways of talking about "transformation" (Stroller 1997:6-7) and social relationships.

It took me a bit longer, however, to understand and begin to live within what initially appeared to be a world filled with suspicion, jealousy, and close monitoring of interpersonal activities and relationships. Families expressed significant concern about not only what was happening within their family system, but also about what the neighboring families were doing. This concern brought a new dimension to our notion of "Keeping up with the Joneses," since individuals and families spent time and resources divining and attempting to uncover others' hidden agendas and animosities. During public gatherings such as funerals, family members would take measures to fortify themselves, or visit clan shrines for protection, to avert spiritual darts and other insults directed at them. Even at the research center, I heard of concerns about data theft and boundary maintenance issues, suspicious allocation of resources, and visits to local shrines. Scholars working in Africa have long noted how commonplace are these concerns and provided a range of explanations from distant structural-functionalist reductions (see Levi-Strauss or Evans-Pritchard) to richly embodied accounts (Stroller & Olkes 1987, Stroller 1997). The lived reality behind these concerns and related sentiments captured my interest, as they have done for others before me.

Initially, while conducting fieldwork, I lived a life that I thought was parallel to, rather than enmeshed within these concerns. That is, I did not think I lived directly within this realm of suspicion and jealously. It was not until later, however—and in some respects not until I returned home—that I recognized how, as my fieldwork progressed, my own interpersonal concerns started to look remarkably similar to some of the local concerns. I was not concerned about witchcraft or sorcery specifically, or—as another visiting scholar feared—going "bush." Nevertheless, as with time I became more attuned to the social and interpersonal relationships. I found myself wondering if someone was trying to "block" my chances? Was someone "laughing" at me? Was someone jealous I did not include him or her in the project?

Family and friends back home thought I was becoming irrational, despite my on-going emphasis that these sorts of concerns are very real. Often, I would talk with my partner about how I feared people were trying to steal my data. When I would speak with my family I would rage about how people were attempting to sabotage my research relationships. With both, I expressed concerns about being scooped or blocked by a hidden researcher.

My attention and concerns surrounding these issues conveniently arose around the same time I started interviewing and working closely with diviners. Working with the diviners did not cause my attention to shift completely, but it did provide me an outlet to mediate my concerns. When I first started to divine, I focused on the structure and procedure, and less on the meaning and the issue at hand. Superficiality ruled. However, as the local concerns become more real, my approach shifted and I found myself bringing actual issues to the diviner, using the oracle as a legitimate way to address my troubles.

One such issue I brought forth concerned my attempts to gain access to a data set containing records and narratives from spirit child deaths across the district. The approval and negotiation process was taking months, and there was little indication that I would get authorization. I suspected that someone might be sabotaging my chances, despite my efforts to do everything in my power to ensure a positive outcome. The only thing I had not done was consult my ancestors to determine if I may have overlooked something.

One afternoon during a visit with a diviner, we determined that it would be good if I consulted. As he entered his room, I searched around the outside of his compound for four unique-looking sticks I needed to represent the individuals and entities that I suspected were trying to sabotage me. I quickly found what I needed and identified one to represent a mischievous spirit child, two sticks representing two people at the research centre, and one stick representing my partner—the last only as a scientific control of course.

I entered the divination room, placed some money in the basket, and set the four sticks down with the yale. The diviner did not ask what the sticks represented or why I was consulting. I sat cross-legged in front of him and he began to shake the sinyaka. After his divination ancestor and my grandfather connected and agreed to the consultation, we grasped the bakoldoore and began digging through the yale. Through the identification of certain symbolic items, it was immediately apparent that something was amiss, that someone was blocking my attempts for wealth and fame, which I identified with successfully completing my research. Once we articulated the problem, we proceed to identify the person responsible. The bakoldoore began to probe amongst the sticks I had brought into the divination room.

"Is it the short stick?" I asked, as the bakoldoore struck it from the side. "Is it the long one?" I said as it swung around. It continued to move erratically. "Perhaps it is the fat one?" I asked, "If it is the fat one, strike the metal three times!" It stuck once. "No," I narrated, as the diviner continued to rhythmically shake the sinyaka, attempting to hold the ancestors' attention. The bakoldoore continued to riffle through the items with a mind of its own, and identified the short stick by pushing it away from the others and striking the metal three times. "Marcus, from the research center," I said aloud, my suspicions confirmed. Since my divination skills were still limited, I let the diviner take over at that point, and he cast stones and continued to pick through the yale to determine what actions I could take to set things straight, to appease my ancestors, and, in effect, to make my world.

Several days later, I entered to Sirigu market looking for the cowry shells I needed for my prescribed libation to the ancestors. After some searching through the market, I finally found a young Burkinabé man selling what appeared to be random objects, but upon closer inspection, I found he was catering to others such as myself in need of symbolic tools. As we exchanged introductions, I looked through his items, glancing over various small animal skins, old coins, strange metal objects, and, finally, cowry shells. Cowry shells have a long and rich history throughout West Africa as a form of currency and as a symbol of fertility and production. An appropriate symbol I thought. I selected and paid for a handful of shells, purchased the necessary bottle of schnapps from the local "drinking spot," and went home.

The following morning, before anyone else awoke, I grabbed the shells, poured a healthy glass of schnapps, and walked to a nearby cluster of trees and rocks. Ironically, this location also happened to have best mobile phone reception in the area, and was where I would go to call home—communicate with the "beyond." Rather than calling my parents that morning, I called upon my deceased grandfathers to come to my aid. While the sun broke over the horizon, I placed the cowry shells upon a large altar-like rock, and poured several large schnapps libations over the shells. As the schnapps ran down the side of the rock and the bitter aroma climbed into the sky, I thanked my ancestors for protecting me, and asked them to keep a watchful eye over my work. It was too early in the morning for me to join in the schnapps consumption, but I knew my grandfather would be grateful for the extra share.

With my ritual obligation complete, I walked back to my room. Logically I thought this was not going to influence the outcome of my data request, but I could not help but notice how some tension was lifted, I felt a bit better, I knew that I had done all I could do. Throughout the next several weeks, I found myself smiling at and greeting

Marcus and others around the centre more than usual, and I was less paranoid about people trying to block my work. A few weeks later, my data issue was resolved.

The diviner would say that my ancestors had intervened, that they had smiled upon me and pulled the necessary strings to make it happen. My own narrative and meaning-based theory assumes that the divination and ritual altered how I framed the issue, and how I understood and positioned my concerns within the larger social context. That is, divination functioned as a sort of intersubjective intervention that "worked on" my relations to the larger social environment, changing how I interacted with others. Despite this theory, I admit that it is more comforting to consider the diviner's perspective, knowing that the "real" reason for change was because my ancestors were watching my back and that for a few pours of schnapps and some kind words of gratitude they could dramatically change my world.

CHAPTER 5

For the Bush: Spirits, Whitemen, and Ambiguous Sources of Power

I have described concepts related to the house and articulated the role that divination plays both in creating meaning and as a bridge into the ancestral and unseen world. This chapter describes the experiences and meanings associated with the bush and the behaviors, entities, and spaces described as "not for the house." Specifically, I articulate how particular entities, practices, and forms of knowledge are experienced and understood vis à vis the house and their compatibility or lack of compatibility with it. For example, I describe how bush spirits are often regarded as ambiguous entities, since they are frequently vested with the power to benefit as well as destroy the house.

Within this chapter I begin with a description of the bush followed by a depiction of two common threats to the house—sorcery and witchcraft. I then describe the various entities of the bush wherein the spirit child is categorized. This chapter also discusses how the discourse concerning the erosion of bush spaces and the disappearance of spirits and traditional sources of knowledge are a commentary on the on-going impact of colonialism, development, and modernity. In the second half of the chapter, I explain how the meanings and ambiguity associated with whitemen and modernity are similar to traditional understandings associated with the bush. I conclude with a vignette analyzing the sentiments surrounding White Maggi, a food seasoning that symbolically brings many of the above domains into focus.

The themes presented in this chapter are essential to understanding the spaces in which the spirit child dwells; the relationship between the spirit child, other spirits, and threats to the house; and, the connections between the spirit child, traditional practices, and social change. This chapter develops the context of, and describes, these themes. The subsequent chapters elaborate upon them in reference to the spirit child.

Bush Space

The notion of *place* and *space* are variable and contested constructs. Predefined or definitive notions of place/space often have limited utility when they are not adapted to or reflective of local sociocultural contexts. Accordingly, I found it necessary to adapt

Casey's (2001) broad phenomenological notions of place/space to fit the Nankani context.

I regard place as the lived environment of the body, a location of physical action embedded within and invested with the collective social, political, and historical. While Casey describes space as a precultural void or "potential place" where human action and meaning have yet to be inscribed, I regard space as having meaning and culture by virtue of it being articulated and applied as a social construct. Within the Nankani context specifically, "the bush" is an appropriate parallel for signifying and describing space. Nankani understandings of space or the bush are in reference to a location where the boundaries are often ambiguous or shifting, where understandings of it are incomplete, where there is no human habitation, where people's experiences and interaction with it are temporary, where meanings—if they exist—are variable, and where the moral imagination can run wild. A bush space can become a place when people engage and recognize it as such, rendering it "inhabited" by inscribing and mapping it within social relationships and meanings. This notion of inhabitation is central to defining places, since it positions them in relation to the larger social webs and interrelationships.

The actual size of a bush space can vary. Some spaces are expansive, covering many square miles of uninhabited land. Alternatively, the bush can be a hillside or a small group of trees. Farms, since they are cultivated, are not described as bush. Footpaths leading between the bush and domestic places can be described as liminal and ambiguous areas (cf. Gottlieb 1992). Various elements of daily life are associated with the notion of domestic places or bush spaces and such categorizations frequently appear in daily speech. Animals may be categorized as "for the house," "for the bush," or, as in the case of dogs, somewhere in between. This distinction is also applied to various foods.

The bush is an ambiguous and wild space. To "go bush" frequently signifies going wild or becoming drunk. In addition to the individual disorderliness related in going bush, the bush is associated with elements that are counter to the interests of the social and family system. Illnesses come from the bush, as do spirit children and other spiritual dangers that can disrupt a family. Dangerous animals are for the bush. People only enter the bush if necessary, either to relieve themselves, to gather firewood, or to hunt. Traditionally, having sex in the bush is regarded as a dangerous and forbidden activity.

Despite the associated dangers, or maybe because of them, the bush is also regarded as a source of knowledge and for things deemed beneficial to families. Historically, hunters would go out to the bush not only to obtain food, but also to acquire new knowledge or power. For instance, many of the medicines used to treat ailments are found in the bush and areas beyond the house or village. Due to these good and bad associations, community members regard the bush with ambiguity.

Since the bush is associated with the spiritual or unseen realm, areas in or near the bush such as sacred ancestral shrines located in treed areas (tingane), rocks, and hillsides connect with spiritual and mystical themes. In particular, the tingane conceptually represents a point between the bush and the domestic world, between the ancestral and the human worlds, by virtue of its liminal position. The tingane has qualities associated with both domains since they are located within treed and uninhabited areas and contain ancestral shrines representing the house. Thus sacrificing domesticated animals "for the house"—such as goats or fowls—at such liminal locations establishes a closer connection to the world of the living and the ancestral or spiritual worlds.

Community members describe how the house and village places were created for humans and the bush was created as the dwelling place for the various spirits on earth. Just as humans can cross into bush spaces, spirits like the spirit child are also looking for ways to enter domesticated places. The following sections describe the types of spirits inhabiting the bush and the ambiguity associated with them. First, I describe sorcery and witchcraft, two distinct threats to the integrity of the house.

Sorcery

Although the ancestors can protect you from various physical and spiritual threats, their protection is often incomplete, inconsistent, and difficult to control. Additionally, ancestors rarely grant people specific powers, skills, or medicines to use at will. One significant source of power and medicine is from sorcery, referred to locally as *baagre*. *Juju* is often used as the local English term to describe sorcery. Practitioners of sorcery are called *bagadaana*.

Baagre powers in general are diverse in purpose and fluid in their ability to transgress boundaries. They can be good or bad and be used to heal, protect, or harm. While divination may seem like sorcery, it is not in fact a sorcery practice, although diviners may use sorcery powers to enhance their divinatory skills. A researcher born and raised in the district described sorcery powers to me in detail:

> That is what we call the African electronics. Some call it juju. Basically, whatever happens in the physical realm also happens in the spiritual realm. A guy can take a spiritual missile, look at you, and—pow!—you're sick or you die. Mostly, it takes place at certain social gatherings, at funerals, at festivals, where people come to show their power. People don't walk up and physically attack you, they fire missiles at you in the spiritual realm. When a missile comes your way you may not die immediately, sometimes when you get home there is nothing wrong with you. Then at night you have a mysterious illness and you die. So those really are things that we do.
>
> I remember at certain festivals you would find juju men taking their knives and cutting themselves, but the knife would not enter. But when they gave the same knife to you, it would enter. You'd cut yourself. These men would be cutting themselves and competing with each other. Such things are a part of African culture, [part of] a belief system in which people believe strongly. There are even people who are educated at the university level, who have doctorates, PhDs—some of them still go to these people to protect themselves, protect their job, protect them while they are traveling. Even politicians. You have people patronizing the services of these juju men because they can see and they can protect. They can help you get a job, make a woman pregnant, they can help you to do all those things. It's part of the system.

Some dimensions of sorcery are associated with wildness. Elijah, when describing someone with strong powers remarked, "It means that the fellow is somebody wild [or is bush]. People have to fear him or he will kill them."

Sorcery powers may vanish if used indiscriminately or excessively. The ownership of sorcery items imposes several requirements on its owner, for example, specific food and behavioral taboos must be followed or the protection that the item offers will be removed. Family members may inherit sorcery powers only if the user is able to follow the requirements for owning the medicine.

While there may initially seem to be some similarities between witchcraft (discussed below) and sorcery, the primary difference resides in the broad scope of sorcery powers, how a person acquires their power, and how the power is used. Witchcraft is only for evil, while sorcery powers can be for either good or bad purposes. Asorigiya describes sorcery power and the differences between sorcery and witchcraft:

> Juju is something that you have acquired on this earth. It is about having powers. Juju is like water. You use it to wash your face and then, as you're sitting, you'll be able to see what's happening in the house. You can see that. If someone is going to die in the house you'll know. You'll see the ancestor come and put something in that person's food. That one is juju. You can see what is happening in the spiritual world. As for witches, you cannot acquire that on earth. Witchcraft is from God.

The physical location of sorcery shrines illuminates further characteristics of sorcery. Patrilineal ancestral shrines are located outside of the house for people to see, thus representing the public characteristics of the patrilineal line as well as the structural dimensions of society and interpersonal interactions. Because of this public position, the ancestors have limited ability to bestow discretionary powers upon descendants and descendants have minimal if any control over ancestors. Unlike these ancestral shrines, sorcery shrines are concealed by family members within pots hidden in rooms in the house. This is in sharp contrast to the public face attributed to ancestral shrines. I posit that power is enhanced though concealment and that concealment of power gives the user greater flexibility and control in its application.

Generally, the accumulation of sorcery power and its use is associated with the *individual* or personal power, whereas patrilineal ancestor powers are by comparison more *socially* oriented and bound by structure. Although I associate the accumulation and enactment of sorcery with the individual, this does not mean that sorcery does not have social implications. The application of sorcery medicine to harm or heal always has broader social consequences. Since sorcery is primarily controlled and enacted by an individual and is hidden, it is regarded with greater suspicion and ambiguity.

Finally, many of the sorcery medicines and related practices are highly mobile and come from southern Ghana and from other neighboring ethnic groups. Although regarded as "traditional," sorcery—as it is presently practiced in the region—is a relatively new phenomenon and will continue to adapt as new forms of power arise and social change occurs.

Witchcraft

Witchcraft (*soa*) is a significant concern for many community members. Beliefs in witchcraft are not limited to community members with traditional beliefs, since beliefs and practices surrounding witchcraft cut across all social, religious, and economic levels within Nankani society. Even devout Christians fear it and have evidence pointing to its existence and power. The most significant local concern regarding witches is their ability to capture a person's soul, causing sickness and possibly death. After capturing a soul, witches will either eat it or sell it in exchange for wealth or material items.

From an early age, children are told stories about witches and instructed on how to avoid or deal with them. Ayanobasiya explains:

> When we were children and wanted to go out around bedtime—maybe you need to go outside to urinate—we were told we'd see fire on those trees. Or you'd see a light flying around, going this way or that way. People would say those are witches flying around like that, and that they will sight on you, so you should best go to sleep. When you see a light like that, you should turn your face and put your hands over it, you don't want to look at them. You just go to sleep.

Witches navigate at night by using lights and commonly gather at night near trees designated with a light. Stories about people's encounters with witches emphasize the importance of avoiding accidental contact with witches at night, since they may identify you and capture you before you are able to "reveal their secret" (*n'peligoho*) to others.

Witches can be either men or women. The transmission of witchcraft powers occurs through the matrilateral side of families. If your mother is a witch then you are one as well. However, a person may choose not to use their powers or choose to become a *soputo*, a person who has the power to "see" and uncover other witches. Regardless of how a person uses their powers, community and family members often regard those with witchcraft powers with ambivalence, since one is never completely certain of their activities.

Witches are common and witchcraft suspicions are a frequent concern. For example, a neighbor may attribute someone's wealth, status, or sickness to witchcraft-related activities. Everyone knows several people who are witches and many people themselves are witches or have witchcraft in their families. They are everywhere, as one man remarked. Geschiere describes witchcraft as "the dark side of kinship" that arises, in part, from the close intimacy of family systems (1997:11) and, as I found for the Nankani, the ambiguous powers associated with the matrilateral side of the family.

Witches can only "catch" and "sell" their own family members and cannot directly harm non-kin. A woman told me that a truly evil witch would have no qualms with catching and selling the souls of her children. If a witch wishes to harm someone who is not in his or her family, he or she will make a pact to trade souls with another witch who is a relative of the person the first witch wishes to destroy.

After a witch captures a soul, the soul is eaten by his or her group of witches, or it may be sold. Membership in this group requires the eventual offering a soul to the other members of the group to eat. This reciprocation is necessary, particularly if the member has taken part in the eating of another's soul.

Witches are believed to often hide the souls of those that they capture before eating or selling them. If the witch is treating the soul of the person badly, the victim may suffer and fall ill. If the victim is strong, he or she may not get sick; however, a weak victim may be instantly incapacitated. When a witch has caught the soul of a person, they will listen to the family's reaction concerning the health of the victim and the steps taken to help them. The family may try to counteract the witchcraft by going to a diviner and visiting an herbalist or sorcerer. If the family is proactive and believes witchcraft is involved, they may use a soputo to find the witch before it is able to further abuse the soul or eat it. If the witch decides to eat the soul, thus killing the victim, he or she will bring the soul to where the witches meet at night. The witch will place the soul within a goat, and the goat will be killed and eaten.

You cannot physically determine that people are witches unless you see them flying at night with their light. Divination can reveal a witch, but it usually requires corroborating evidence such as a long series of sicknesses in the family or strong suspicion of witchcraft. It may take several years to determine if a person is indeed a witch. If family members strongly suspect a witch is making someone sick, the extended family is called together and a trial conducted. The family hires a soputo to help detect the witch by encouraging a confession or conducting a water trial.

During the water trial, each family member must drink water infused with herbs provided by the soputo. Those who are not witches will only taste the water; witches on the other hand will drink until their stomach is full and they begin to defecate, vomit, and confess the names of all the people they have captured. This trial illustrates the strength of the metaphor of uncontrolled consumption and witchcraft. When the witch cannot consume any more water, family members begin stepping on his or her stomach, forcing the water out and, in a symbolic sense, what the witch has consumed. Sometimes the trial will kill the witch while in other cases they are cured. Numerous community members confirmed this procedure. Ayanobasiya also described a ceremony in which she had recently participated:

> There was a woman that our family suspected. What happened was they brought all the family members to a place. They always bring two little children who will bring the water for the trial. The water is placed inside two pots and the soputo places the medicine inside of the pots. A calabash is used to take the water and pass it around to everyone. If you are innocent, you will only drink a small amount of the water, spit it out, and sit down. If you are a witch you will drink the water and the medicine will go inside and you will continue to drink calabash after calabash. They will keep refilling it and you will continue to drink. You can even consume an entire basin and your entire body will be full of water. I have seen it. They will now ask the person, 'What do you now have to say? You have drunk the whole thing. What do you have to say?' This is when the person will start confessing. 'I have done this, it's I who have killed that person and done this and that.' The family members say this is the person they have been looking for, the person that has been causing all the problems. Then they will begin to step on [the witch]. Water will come out of [their] mouth and anus, everything, and [they] will become a normal person. Then [the family] pays the soputo and everyone will go home. The woman whom I saw treated died.

If the witch is a woman and she survives the trial, she may be forcefully removed from the house and returned to her father. If it is a man, the family may exclude him from all activities and closely monitor his behavior. During this time, for both men and women witches, family members remain vigilant over those that are sick because of witchcraft. The convicted witch is encouraged to return the soul he or she has captured and is responsible for making sure the sick family member improves. If the sick person dies because of witchcraft, the male witch is excommunicated from the family, driven away from the house, and forced to wander.

Witchcraft discourse and experiences play a significant role in shaping everyday experiences and understandings. Joe and other community members explained that people believe in witchcraft and sorcery because such practices work for people. Many community members are actively involved in searching for new sorcery powers, finding ways to use witchcraft, or generally trying to gain an advantage through spiritual means. A woman explained that people are looking for spiritual powers to "take care of *themselves*" because, as she remarked, "They believe they've really gone into it. They agree that they are witches. If someone says they are a witch they have to accept the accusation because they are."

There are cases where the witchcraft-related powers and urges are overwhelming and beyond the individual's control. In an early colonial report in the region, Cardinall remarks that a woman from a Nankani settlement admitted to having caught many souls, but in her own defense "she insisted that she could not control the evil actions of her own soul in doing so" (1920:44 in Parker 2006:363).

Other than gaining an advantage over someone, why do people practice witchcraft? Ayanobaisya remarked that it is usually about jealousy.

> Maybe you are rich and the person is not. If you have children and they are richer than that fellow is, sometimes that person may want to kill you or cause harm so that you will not get anything. Sometimes you may quarrel with someone, and that person may find a way to catch you. Or, a woman may be jealous that you have a child and she does not. She can catch you.

Elijah noted that people closely monitor other family and community members. Sudden increases in wealth or good fortune are indicative of witchcraft and suspicions may arise concerning the origins of wealth. Statements such as "Who did he have to eat?" reflect a core question pertaining to why some individuals are able to increase their wealth or status while others are unable. Witchcraft beliefs and practices reflect community members' concerns. Jealously, achieving success or power, accessing resources or modernity, and unchecked consumption are prominent themes. Although witches do work in groups, many elements of witchcraft are fundamentally individual activities that threaten the stability and integrity of the house.

Community members unanimously claim that witchcraft has worsened over the past decades and that it has never been as bad as it is today. Several indicated that NGOs should address the problem. Modernity is a likely force driving the rise in witchcraft within the district. Comaroff and Comaroff (1993) observe how ritual and witchcraft are used as modes of empowerment in a world where modernity and its spoils are unequally distributed. Geschiere (1997) describes how witchcraft is less a relic of "tradition" and more of a response to the modern and an alternative source of power. It is hard to ignore the references to modernity and larger global forces in Nankani discourse on witchcraft, as witchcraft is a prominent way to discuss inequality, suspicions, and the disjunction between what one has and what one desires or expects.

The foregoing has discussed two threats that reside within the family and are dangerous to the house. The following section describes the ambiguous and often wild entities that dwell within the bush but have the capacity to cross boundaries into domesticated spaces to either benefit the family—by offering knowledge from afar—or destroy it.

Bush Spirits

The Nankani identify two major spirits and three other minor spirits as part of their spirit system. The most common spirit is the *kulkariga* (pl. *kulkarsi*) followed by the *sisigo* (pl. *sisito*), or spirit child. When referring to bush spirits in general, the term kulkarsi is frequently used. The three lesser spiritual beings identified by my informants are tree spirits, the *koko*, and the *ken-ensigire*. There is a sixth bush entity called the *seto*. The seto is less spiritual in nature and more animal-like and is associated with witchcraft. This section describes the bush spirits and the seto. I elaborate on the spirit child in the subsequent chapters. The characteristics and discourse concerning bush spirits reflect understandings about bush and domestic space, particularly boundaries and liminal areas. Stories about spirits tell us a great deal about Nankani concerns, about their sociocultural world, epistemological foundation, and moral imagination.

The Kulkarsi

The essential nature of the kulkarsi is good and their relationships with humans are regarded as helpful. They may be playful at times or mischievous, and for their own enjoyment may frighten people—particularly people who find themselves in an unfamiliar place. Asingiya explained to me how the kulkarsi came to earth before man and the other spirit beings to create the world. God may have thought of the design for the world, he remarked, but "it was actually the kulkarsi who built it." They arranged the rivers, moved rocks, and positioned the mountains.

Not all people can see the kulkarsi, who are nonetheless able to show themselves if they desire. If you are lucky and you do spot one, it usually vanishes quickly. The kulkarsi are described as being very short in statue and having very long hair. A man remarked that they actually look like a child. When a kulkariga walks, he continued, "it walks like a child that is just learning how."

Kulkarsi are a powerful source of knowledge. If you are able to catch one or have the sorcery power to attract them, they can tell you secrets and offer knowledge that will let you prosper. Ayanobasiya described how her uncle knew of a kulkariga living in a well. One day he was able to capture it by the hair and pull it out of the well. It cried out to him to be let go, then began telling him how to grow crops and other things to make him prosperous. An elder described how his father would call the kulkarsi to dance and do work. "They would be walking around," he said, "and you say do this and they'd do it." The kulkarsi can also choose to come near your home at night and tell you things to help you and your family.

A community member described how the kulkarsi enjoy cow's milk. "When there are cows in the family," he described, "and the cow has a calf, sometimes at night a kulkariga will come and suck the milk of the cow. The following day, because the kulkariga has come to suck, the calf will not suck again." He described how his ancestors would place a glue-like substance on the teat of the cow so when the kulkariga came again they could capture it. "Actually they would see it, just like a child. They would tie it up and ask it to tell them all the things." The kulkariga would describe how to treat various sicknesses, even snakebite. "Sometimes they would take hold of the kulkariga and take it to the bush so it would show them which herbs to use."

Some people remarked that you have to kill a kulkariga after it discloses everything to you. If you do not kill it, you will forget everything it taught you. "If you just leave it, even if you walk a small step away, it will just say, '*tam tam, yim yim*'—'let him forget, let him forget'— and you will forget everything."

Community members described how if you follow behind a kulkariga and step in its footprints, you could easily vanish. Asingiya described how it is not good to step in the places where they have been. "When you go to the trees out there, if you go and look within those trees, you will see a place that is very clean with no plastic bags or any trash. You should go there and step to see what will happen! It's a kulkarsi grave. If you step on it, it will easily harm you or you can disappear." The kulkarsi also live in water. If you fall into the water, it is said that the kulkarsi will take you and keep you underwater for years and teach you their ways. When a person comes back they will be a "specialist," with knowledge on how to treat many diseases.

When there was still wild game in the bush, hunters would often encounter the kulkarsi or set traps for them. If you should be walking out in the bush, Elijah explains, and a kulkariga chooses you, "It will show you wonderful things. Sometimes they will even follow you." Diviners sometimes will work with a kulkariga and combine its powers with that of the bakologo and their ancestors to identify problems. Sorcerers and herbalists will also use the kulkarsi to treat clients or entertain people. Asorigiya discusses his experiences of a sorcerer with the ability to call the kulkarsi.

> There are people who are very powerful. They have juju and other spiritual means to invite those spirits to come to their house to entertain them, to sing or dance, or perform other things. Because the man has juju powers it makes the kulkarsi powerless. He will have control over them. I have even gone to watch them. There was a man at Basengo who had very powerful juju. He would call the spirits to come and dance. When at his house, we all went inside the traditional room. When the kulkarsi came you could hear the sound that they made as they climbed on top of the roof [imitates sound], klunk, klunk. Then they would pass through the hole [a small three-inch diameter hole in the ceiling for light] and enter the room. It's dark in there, but you can hear the noises when they come.
>
> After all the kulkarsi arrived they asked the juju man if there are other people present. The man said no, that there are no people. But the kulkarsi kept asking, 'We have heard the people and their breathing.' The man said, 'No, it's the dogs that are breathing that way.' The kulkarsi can

> really see the people, they are just saying that because they are trying to brag for the man, and they are entertaining. When ready they will dance and sing, but you can't see them, just hear them. In those days, the people really had those powers.

In a separate story, Asorigiya describes kulkarsi sexual activities. The story touches on a theme that crops up in many other stories and myths worldwide, that of the penis being trapped or damaged during intercourse, or of a man being deceived by a woman during intercourse. In the following story we also see an example of a desirous kulkariga. Although I do not provide an in-depth analysis of this narrative as part of this chapter, I reference this example later in my conclusion concerning the spirit child and the moral imagination.

> There was another time that I heard the kulkarsi talking while at the man's house. Those ones that came to him, they even had names. One time as they were dancing, the spirits were talking among themselves. One spirit who arrived late had his clothing open. His penis was out and it appeared to have sores on it. The other spirits asked what had happened. The kulkariga explained, 'When I was coming here, I saw something very red and open. I asked, what is that? It was a woman that was exposing herself while urinating in the open. When she saw me, she asked what I had hanging out. I replied it was a penis. She asked why I hadn't just given it to her. So I started having sex with the woman but something happened to my penis—it was held in place and I couldn't get it out.'

Stories about mischievous kulkarsi are prominent. They can also remove or destroy people's clothing. They are prone to untying and even riding horses. Several people remarked, "You will see the horse riding all over the place, but you won't see anybody on it." Another man described how his father placed glue on the back of his horse and captured the kulkariga attempting to ride it. A man explained how his ancestor would use the kulkarsi to steal food. "Sometimes the women may be bringing some local cakes to the market," he recalled, "My ancestor would be sitting at this house and see the women walking by. He would send the kulkarsi to get the food. Without the woman knowing, they would take all the cakes from the basin and replace them with cow shit. When the woman reached the market she would quickly realize she no longer had any cakes."

The colonial presence and modernity changed the landscape of spirits. Several families described how a father or grandfather communicated with the kulkarsi and how kulkarsi roamed around the bush, but how such powers and experiences today are rare. In fact, many of the spirits, particularly the kulkarsi, have vanished "because the whiteman has come, and spoiled all of those things." Environmental degradation, the loss of traditional beliefs, and the spread of Christianity are described as contributors to the kulkarsi's demise. The sound of guns, which also signifies the coming of the whitemen, was described as scaring the spirits away. Ayanobasiya remarked, "These days, because we have modernization and Christianity, people don't believe in the traditional things or the old ways." Asorigiya, also lamenting the disappearance of the kulkarsi, made this observation: "The fact is that today there are no trees on the land, that is why they don't stay here anymore. These days the land is so bare. They don't have hiding places, the land is always bad. It's also because we don't even listen to other things anymore, we don't follow or sit down to observe nature."

The Koko

The koko and the ken-ensigir*e* are former human-beings who have died and come back to life in a spirit-like form. They also have some characteristics akin to zombies, or reanimated corpses. The koko is specifically a deceased witch or a person with witchcraft power who has died and come back to life. Those that are not witches cannot become a koko at death. Parker also describes the koko as a ghost of a deceased witch with shapeshifting powers and he quotes from a 1925 account taken from the White Father's mission in Bolgatanga: "The natives … fear these ghosts very much. If they touch the natives, they become all white and die" (Parker 2006:372).

The koko is quite powerful. If it passes near a person he will become weak and "unable to do anything." If it touches you, you may die or become an "abnormal person"—that is, mentally ill. It also has the power to make a part of your body deformed and "not like a human being again." Ayisoba remarked, "It also comes into the houses to disturb people. According to our fathers, you can be sitting like that and as it passes by you will fall down." He also indicated that there is no treatment. A man remarked that the "good thing" about the koko is that it cannot kill someone who does not have *nifo*, the eye, or ability to *see* spiritual things or things related to witchcraft. "If you can't see," remarked a man, "it will just throw sand at you, and laugh as you fall down."

When a witch dies, his or her soul will stay behind inside the house as the body is buried. Asingiya, who is an undertaker, remarked that families often will have an undertaker that "can see." When someone dies, this specialist undertaker is able to determine if the deceased is really the dead person and if the deceased's spirit has left the body and is hiding somewhere in the room. If you do not have an undertaker with nifo, the spirit remains behind inside the room when the body is buried. If the children of the house are also witches—thus with the power to see—they will know the koko is there and feed it. As it grows the koko takes on an animal-like appearance, forming two additional legs and a tail. When it is fully grown, it leaves the house to roam around the bush. The specialist undertakers also have a medicine that protects people from the koko that roam and are able to drive the koko from a house.

The Ken-ensigire

The ken-ensigire is someone who has died and come back to life. It can take either the form of a zombie or a ghost. They cannot hurt people and usually "they just roam about." It can appear either before or after the actual death of a person. For example, a person who is about to die may appear in a ghostly form to a friend or relative in a town far away several days before their actual death. Often the ken-ensigire appears wearing a white robe "like what the Catholic priests wear," as Mathew remarked. The ken-ensigire can also appear after someone has died. A local researcher described to me how he witnessed a deceased man mysteriously arise from the grave and wander around the nearby compounds an hour after his burial.

The Seto

The seto was mentioned infrequently and it was difficult for me to determine if it was a spirit or more closely associated with witchcraft or the animal world. I was able to determine that the seto was a violent monster of sorts that seeks out raw human flesh to feast upon. Mathew described how as children the seto stories were used to frighten them, similar to the Euro-American boogieman. Children would be warned not to roam around at night. Adults would also advise children not to sleep outside on top of a room to escape the inside heat during in the dry season because the seto "can just pick you up, carry you away, and eat you raw."

The uncontrolled consumptive qualities of the seto, particularly its desire to eat humans conceptually connects it with witchcraft. Asorigiya noted that back when wild animals still lived near Sirigu and "before the sound of the gun drove the animals away, there was the seto. It's similar to witchcraft. They say that the seto would come and catch you in those days." He recalled a story about the seto that, interestingly, involves whitemen as a mediating force.

> There's a village at the Bongo side near Burkina Faso. The forest nearby was full of those things. About sixteen years ago a seto caught a child and ate it raw. When you go to the place you can see the blood. There were many seto then, but because they caught that child, the community reported it to the whitemen. When the whitemen came with their guns they surrounded the whole place and opened fire. They were able to kill sixteen of them inside the forest. The rest vanished and you don't see them anymore.

Trees Spirits

In general, community members believe that most objects—including spirits, rocks, and trees—have a spirit or soul, human-like needs and social organization, and engage in activities similar to people. They talk to each other, eat and drink, are desirous, divine, and most importantly, have families and kin. While describing trees, Asingiya remarked, "Trees can do all the things that human beings can do. Seriously, if you think that I'm lying you can come and sleep at my house tonight! There's a tree over there that even soothsays. It does all the soothsaying things. Even the rattle, you can hear it. The tree is doing that. They can even fetch water."[9]

Asorigiya also recalled a story illustrating the similarities between trees and people. This story offers an explanation for people's fear of leaving the family compound at night due to spirits, witches, and other malevolent powers that may be roaming about.

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[9] It is worth noting that Asingiya automatically assumed that I would not believe him and took a stance attempting to convince me that trees are like humans. I made no indication of disbelief. My status as an outsider, however, may have made him assume that I would not believe him.

> A long time ago some women went to the riverside to fetch water late at night. At that time, some trees near the shrines for Sirigu were still talking to each other. One of the trees sent his wife to fetch water from the river. The tree wife had a child, so she left it behind with her husband. When she reached the water, she saw all the humans at the riverside fetching water, so she stopped and just stood there not knowing what to do. While waiting for a long time, she heard her child start crying.
>
> "Why are you not bringing the water?" her husband called out.
>
> She yelled back, "What can I do? There are humans just standing here!"
>
> The women fetching water, upon hearing the trees call out, immediately started running back to their houses leaving their basins behind. When the women ran off the tree collected her water and went back to her house. The women, because they were so scared, never went to the riverside late in the night again.

As with people, there are good trees and bad trees. Some hurt people, but many are simply mischievous—like the kulkarsi—and their only intent is to frighten. People described how you could be walking down a path and a tree would attempt to frighten you by throwing stones. However, the stones never actually hit the person, since a tree just wants to scare people and would never physically harm someone in such a way. Sometimes trees will only frighten strangers, but not the families that live near them. Mathew described how as a child, people would tell them that a particular tree was bad and how it would throw stones to frighten you. "I can still remember trees like that," Mathew recalled. "People would be talking about them." Another man describes such a tree near his home.

> It usually happens late in the night. In the old days it was very rampant, but not as rampant as the spirit child. There was a tree near our house. Sometimes when we were out walking, the tree would try to frighten us. When you got near the tree, a small donkey would come out and start running around you. You'd become confused—like you'd lost your senses—you wouldn't even know what was happening. It only wanted to frighten you. After that, it would go away. If you knew that the donkey was coming, and you were capable, you could stone it and it wouldn't come near you again.

Other community members described trees taking the form of a donkey that will run circling you and quickly vanish before your eyes. I interviewed a man who talked about how a tree near his house frequently turned into a donkey. One evening a family member shot the donkey with an arrow. The following day the donkey was gone, but he found the arrow stuck in a tree.

Ayisoba remarked that a tree can enter your house to steal something and cause confusion or fighting. He described how a tree can go into a room, for example, and steal meat. When a man realizes that the meat is gone, he will blame someone in the family and confusion will result. While trees are mischievous when in the physical form of a tree, they become more dangerous when they take human form, particularly when they appear as one's kin. Ayanobasiya described that when a tree changes into a human it gains the same power to destroy as possessed by a normal human being.

If a tree approaches a person it will most likely beg for food or water. One man remarked, "Even if you are in the house eating something, and the tree wants it and it's very wicked, it can come to you and beg." After either receiving what it asks for, or being denied, the tree may simply vanish. A man told me that you must always give to a tree that begs from you, as you can never be sure if it is a tree or a real person or a family member.

Asorigiya told me a story about a woman that was going to the borehole to fetch water. While walking along the path leading to the borehole she was eating groundnuts—eating while walking is a common taboo that attracts spirits. When she passed an evil tree, it decided to follow her and "beg" for some groundnuts. She never noticed the tree begging, as it remained behind her as she finished eating and collecting her water. Angered that she did not share, the tree went on its way. Upon returning home, the woman became "mentally disturbed." Asorigiya described her as crying for no reason and acting very strange. Through a diviner, the woman's family members discovered that the tree was the cause of her mental state. During a divination session, the family ancestors talked with the tree spirit and asked why it made the woman ill. The tree responded, "She was not doing the right thing. I begged for groundnuts and the woman did not give." The ancestor told the tree, however, that the woman never even saw him or had the opportunity to share her food. Therefore, it was not justified to make her ill. The tree soon agreed with the ancestors perspective and the family was able to follow the necessary sacrifices to placate the tree. The woman got better.

The most prominent malevolent action of a tree spirit is to cause mental illness, locally described as *gongo*, which is a person without sense or a person that is "mad."[10] A woman remarked, "If you see someone laughing and talking and doesn't know anything, or is wandering around like they have no sense, it's the trees that have done that." Trees can also cause milder complaints like tiredness or apathy. A tree may do this to someone by the simple fact that it is "wicked" or if a person fails to give a begging tree water or food.

Tree related sicknesses are recognized as difficult to treat. Often, families will divine to determine if it is a tree that is responsible for a person's illness, then consult an herbalist or sorcerer to determine how to treat it. They will approach the responsible tree, determine what the tree wants, and make amends. A man describes an experience his neighbor had with a tree:

> The man was sick and they couldn't find any local cures, so two of his brothers got together and found a powerful herbalist. They determined that a certain tree was causing his illness. The herbalist confronted the tree with his medicine and it confessed all the people that it had killed. Before the herbalist was able to perform the rite the tree attacked him, a branch fell but he dodged it in time and continued treating. Soon after the treatment the sick man got better.

Troublesome trees do not affect people in possession of a specific type of tree medicine or related sorcery powers. Depending on the power of this medicine, a tree may simply fear that person or the medicine will permit its user to "see" and destroy evil trees. If a family must cut down an offending tree, an ordinary person will not have the power to do so unless they find someone with this medicine.

One afternoon at the beginning of the dry season, I made a comment about the number of dust devils, or small twisters, spinning around the savanna. Traditionally, these "*wakayarum*" are thought to cause sickness or be tree spirits roaming about the land. Mathew mentioned how it is common to be sitting with a group of elders and have them suddenly become silent as a wakayarum approaches. To speak when a wakayarum passes will attract its attention and it may chase after you, often with fatal consequences. Asorigiya recalled an incident about how an herbalist and his friend were walking down the side of a road one afternoon as a wakayarum approached. Since the wakayarum was blocking the path leading to his friend's house, the herbalist warned him not to walk near it, as it could make him sick. The man didn't listen, although the herbalist pleaded with him to stop. He crossed the road onto the trail and walked into the path of the wakayarum. Later that evening the man became ill with severe diarrhea. He sent a relative to bring his herbalist friend, but the herbalist refused, saying that he cannot treat him because he did not heed his warnings. Three days later the man died because of the wakayarum.

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[10] Madness is the local English term used to describe mental illness.

Although I focus primarily on bad tree spirits, there are many trees that are recognized as good and wanting to help people. Trees offer numerous foods, medicines, and other ingredients used to treat a variety of spiritually related conditions, such as the spirit child. A man also described how a good tree might also come into a house to assist a woman giving birth.

I noticed that spirits often enjoy living around trees and the bush in general. God made it this way, I was told, because spirits cannot live with people or within domestic places. A man remarked: "God made the trees and the bush for spirits; they are drawn there because that is where they are supposed to live."

Analysis of Spirits

Parker describes the Tallensi "and their savanna neighbors" as inhabiting a "cognitive universe saturated with anxieties about maleficent humans and threatening supernatural forces" (2006:354). Indeed parts of Nankani experience are shaped by concerns regarding others and the spiritual world (this use of "supernatural" is not appropriate in this case), but to characterize their experience and lives as an anxiety-saturated cognitive universe is a misconception. Remarks such as Parker's, and possibly my own emphasis placed on witchcraft and the spiritual run the risk of characterizing Nankani thought as irrational or overly superstitious. It is neither. I feel that it is important to note that these "anxieties" and concerns—or whatever term one chooses to categorize Nankani experiences of witches and spirits—are very real experiences. They express a reality that with proper analysis, rather than limited observation, provides insight into the sociocultural forces within their society and what is at stake in people's lives. This section moves beyond Parker's notion and discusses the larger meanings expressed within the Nankani beliefs regarding spirits.

Many things in the Nankani world are considered to be "alive" or to have a soul-like characteristic. However, saying that traditional Nankani are just animists and stopping there is incomplete. Not only do various objects such as trees and rocks have a soul, they also have their own social networks that are often connected to human social webs. We see spirits engaging in human-like activities such as gathering water and human-like desires are attributed to them. These representations of the mundane within the spiritual world, according to Jackson, are an allegorization that "enables people to think more objectively about immediate social concerns" (1982:20). At the grand level, spiritual beings and events are symbolic of larger social relations. In light of these relationships, it is also important to ensure that the meanings and "moral resonance" within spirit-related narratives are articulated and not just reduced to the social matrix (Jackson 1982:20-21).

Exploring the spirits' relationship to the socially oriented notions of Nankani personhood is a good analytical starting point. As previously discussed, personhood is determined by an individual's connection to and position within the larger familial and social web of relations. This larger social web of relationships is also linked to the ancestral and spiritual realm. Consequently, just as a person's actions connect and affect the web of family relationships, personal actions also have implications extending into the ancestral and spiritual world.

I posit that due to these social interrelationships, spirits and even animals are recognized as having some of the fundamental qualities that comprise human personhood. This perspective is supported further when we consider that notions of personhood in Nankani society are understood in relationship to this non-human world of spirits and ancestors. This becomes apparent when, following Jackson's line of thinking, we seek definitions of the person and self, particularly in relation to power. Such definitions must include these spiritual, sorcery, and ancestral relationships and the powers they bestow because these external relationships are central in "amplifying" and "containing" the self (Jackson 1982:22).

Throughout this work and primarily for analytical purposes, I often make strong distinctions between spirit and human worlds. In reality, the boundaries that separate these realms are porous and fluid. Ancestors and spirits pass through the permeable boundary between the human and spiritual worlds easily. Spirits are able to manifest themselves physically and both spirits and ancestors can make their presence known through their actions and influence on this world. While most people do not have the ability to see spirits, ancestors or the spiritual world, family members can communicate with them through divination.

The distinctions between good and bad spirits, like the distinctions between people, are not always black and white. Spirits like the kulkarsi, despite their good intentions, may potentially cause problems. The ambiguous nature of spirits and their mischievous caprice emphasizes their destructive potential and people's experience of them.

The actions and relationships with trees spirits are symbolic of human relationships and the ambiguities and illnesses caused by trees reflect larger family and social concerns. The most apparent local understanding of trees is their use as a naturalistic explanatory model for what we would categorize as mental illness. From a Euro-American diagnostic perspective, trees are most often described as causing schizophrenic-like illnesses as well as congenital or late-onset mental disabilities and epilepsy. Occasionally trees and other spirits were described as being responsible for more affective complaints such as lethargy and avolition. What is important about these observations is that the cause of a person's illness is a rupture in their social world or a violation of social norms, rather than an individual problem. Appropriate treatment necessitates a family or socially oriented recognition and intervention for the sufferer.

Local understandings surrounding notions of "madness" and "roaming" are also behaviors associated with the bush, as are wild and uncontrolled speech, thoughts, actions, and other socially inappropriate behaviors. It makes sense that when a person's behaviors are understood in reference to the bush that it is something in the bush that would cause the behavior. Trees have the ability to cross over and live both within the bush and within domestic spaces, and have an intimate relationship with humans due to their close proximity to human places. Partly due to this proximity, the Nankani incorporate understandings and experiences of trees within their local social worlds and relationships. I elaborate further. Fortes commented that the way community members described trees as begging is a parody of the way kinsmen or ancestors will ask for sacrifices (1966:14). Consequently, not providing a sacrifice when a relative or ancestor requires one has serious consequences, as does failing to give to a tree something when asked. A "correct person" provides sacrifices to their ancestors when asked and gives to those in need. Always giving to those in need is important even if you do not know the person, since the individual asking may be a relative you do not recognize. Thus denying that unfamiliar person—or tree—is an outright rejection of your social relationship and responsibility to them.

As in numerous other cultures, stories about spirits communicate important lessons to children about what experiences are important to attend to, as well as socially appropriate behaviors. On a pragmatic level, for example, Mathew recalled how he learned people should never swim alone because the spirits living in the water might take you. "It's obviously not just about spirits, it's not safe to swim alone," he remarked. "You could drown." Others confirmed that using spirits as characters in lessons is a common way for elders to teach children.

Finally, the contexts in which my discussions about spirits occurred are important. I found that the spirit-related discourse was a way to talk about the past and critique social change, modernity, and environmental degradation. Asorigiya would attribute the disappearance of spirits with the coming of the whiteman and the changes that came with colonization. Because of the whiteman and modernization, "People are also no longer learning about or observing nature," remarked Asorigiya. "The spirits and the old ways of doing things are disappearing." The following sections elaborate upon the changing nature of knowledge obtained from outside the house, the role of modernity and social change, and the meanings associated with whitemen.

The Bush, Knowledge, and Whitemen

The Bush and Knowledge

According to Nankani tradition, hunters brought back not only food and fruits from the bush, but also knowledge. New medicines and knowledge were often acquired from spirits like the kulkarsi. Hunters also shared experiences and knowledge gained from the bush with others. For example, the recipe to make pito, an important beer-like malt beverage, was learned from a spirit child in the bush. The story follows.

> There was one hunter who went to the bush and climbed to the top of a tree to look around. He saw some spirit children. He could see them physically and they were very short. The hunter was able to watch the spirits making the malt and brewing pito; they could not see him. He had never had pito before so when the spirits left he got down from the tree and drank the pito and found it was very good. He returned to the tree to continue watching. When one spirit came back, he said "Ahh! Who has come here and taken my drink?" This spirit said to himself, "This fellow doesn't know how to make it!" The spirit explained all the steps involved in preparing pito and the hunter was silent as he listened to all the spirit described. It wasn't hard to hear him, since the spirit was shouting loudly. When the spirit left, the hunter quickly returned to his house and instructed his wife on how to make pito. When all the people began to enjoy pito, all the spirit children became angry and swore they'd come into people's houses to attack them because the hunter had taken their knowledge.

This story describes the origin of a locally important form of knowledge (pito making) as originating from the bush. However, such knowledge or materials acquired from the bush are regarded with ambiguity or have strings attached. In the example above, we see how the spirit children were angered and made a commitment to attack humans because their knowledge was stolen. In other cases, when hunters bring back game, it also provides an opportunity for dangerous spirits to enter the house. Thus, people must be careful what they bring back into the house, since new knowledge or other acquisitions may be dangerous because they cross the boundary into the house.

Traditionally, the bush was not the only source of knowledge. Information and trade networks connected groups throughout northern and southern Ghana to one another and to groups beyond. Frequently, the Nankani, like other peoples, would look "outside" to others for new ways to address their concerns. In modern times, the powerful outside sources of knowledge and agents of change were the colonial powers; later, development programs and the on-going results of globalization and modernity became prominent. Community members describe the forces of globalization, change, and knowledge as primarily emanating from the whitemen. The following sections describe the Nankani experience and perception of whitemen and the broader relationships between whitemen, knowledge, modernity, and social change.

Whitemen, Modernity, and Knowledge

As many ethnographers have described, a frequent topic of conversation in the field concerns comparisons regarding race and the physical differences and similarities between the ethnographer and the local people (Bashkov 2006). References to the whitemen and the construct of "race" frequently arose throughout my fieldwork.[11] My whiteness played a significant role in my fieldwork, affecting, among other things, how community members positioned and interpreted my presence. I found it useful to inquire into the local meanings associated with whiteness as a way to understand local perceptions embedded within the discourse related to whitemen—namely colonialism, development, and modernity. In my research, I found that local notions of whitemen and modernity are understood in reference to traditional notions of the bush and the ambiguities and knowledge associated with the bush. I explain this in the following section. First, I examine the Nankani meanings associated with whitemen and describe local accounts of the arrival of whitemen.

Early Nankani Experiences with Whitemen

It wasn't until 1905 that the British attempted to form an administration in the relatively unknown and unexplored frontier region in the Northern Territories of Ghana. Colonial contact within that region up until that time had been primarily punitive. The first challenges identified by the Northern Territories administration centered on how to pacify and control the people in the region and "mobilize its manpower" (Allman & Parker 2005:59).

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[11] To be consistent with local use, I choose to use the term *whiteman/whitemen*, rather than "white person."

Its seems ironic that in addition to the presence of colonial officials, the first whitemen to settle and have a consistent presence within the region were the "White Fathers," a Catholic Missionary Society. Their name was fitting. It wasn't until later that I learned that it was derived from the missionaries' white robes, not their white skin, although locally it may have been understood as both.

The initial presence of whitemen in the north was regarded with ambivalence. Local narratives regarding the initial encounters with the Northern Territories colonial administration illustrate positive as well as negative elements. Asorigiya describes the initial colonial contact in Sirigu.

> When he came to Sirigu the whiteman already had contacts with the chiefs. The whiteman communicated with the people through the chiefs and told them to construct roads. When constructing the roads, they used wood and their bare hands to pound it so it would be strong enough for cars to pass. That way the whitemen were able to live in Navrongo and come here.

People were not paid for their labor, as it was seen by the British as contributing to the development of the colonial system. This "free labor" system, chosen because of the colonial government's inability to impose direct taxation, was more akin to forced labor (Allman & Parker 2006:60). Asorigiya described, "If you were lazy, the whiteman would just beat you."

Asingiya remarked that the first colonial administrators stationed in the area were carried around the area "like Ashanti chiefs," that is, on chairs lashed to support poles carried by human laborers. They were carried this way not because they were lazy or demanded it but because, Asingiya remarked, "We insisted it be that way." If the whiteman was allowed to travel on his own from place to place, "he would undoubtedly get himself into trouble."

Descriptions of early contact with colonial administrators often highlight the significant need to be aware of or monitor not only the whiteman's location, but his mood and temper. Local discourse illustrates a real concern that colonial officials would become easily angered and send in soldiers at the smallest provocation. I recorded an elaborate narrative describing how food was prepared and rushed to white officials with the utmost speed and efficiency to prevent it from becoming cold and inciting their anger.

Placating the colonizer and managing what was perceived as impulsive or even childish outbursts was more effective than outright resistance. In fact, I gained a sense that such discourse concerning the management of the colonial presence was akin to coping with a problematic or unruly child, a powerful reversal when juxtaposed to the racist colonial era stereotype that described African people as childlike.

Narratives identify the whiteman as bringing a positive end to the trafficking of humans and conflict between ethnic groups. The Ashanti or Mossi bore much of the responsibility for the blame assigned to slavery. "Before the whiteman came," an elder remarked, "the Ashanti and others were capturing and fighting with us. It was the whiteman that came and freed us from that, and we were not fighting again … The ancestors were not wise," he continued. "People that were even from the same place were killing each other. That's why the whiteman brought the *knowledge* to prevent them from killing each other." Two elements within this statement are notable. The first element is the framing of the whitemen as a rescuer or redeemer, which we also saw earlier in the story about the soldiers killing the seto. I questioned if this sort of discourse could be attributed to my color. However, it happened frequently and was embedded within several other ethnographic sources and within the development discourse. I felt I could not attribute the notion of whiteman as "redeemer" solely to my skin color. The second element concerns the source of knowledge. Although I discuss this in a later section, what is important here is to recognize not simply that this knowledge came from a whiteman, but that it came from an external source. I will further explore the links between spaces and the origins of knowledge as well as the meanings of whitemen and knowledge.

Race, Difference, and Knowledge

Stories concerning the origins of knowledge in one form or another and the origins of the differences between whitemen and blackmen are present in various forms throughout Africa. I have frequently come across a common self-depreciating story that describes why the unequal balance of knowledge, material items, and technology favor whitemen. The basic form of the story is as follows: Sometime long ago, the whiteman and the blackman were greeted by God and given a choice. They could either choose the book of knowledge or a treasure chest full of riches. It is described that the blackman—desiring wealth and riches—chose the treasure, leaving the whiteman with the book. Unfortunately, he quickly spent the riches, whereas the whiteman acquired knowledge from the book and used it to his benefit to secure endless wealth.

Asingiya told me an alternative version that I feel more accurately reflects the origins of inequality and the current political and economic reality.

"Aaron, is it not true that as the day is breaking here, in America the sun is setting?"

"Of course," I replied, "When the sun rises here, people are sleeping in America." Asingiya continued:

> Do you know that there is a very tall mountain that is separating us? A tall mountain separates America on one side and Africa on this side. So when the sun reaches one side, the mountain covers it. When the mountain covers us, on the American side they have day. When the sun comes back to the African side we have day and you have night.
>
> In the old days, God was much nearer to man and spent a lot of time on that mountain. Around the mountain were some large stones arranged for God to step upon. He would go out on these stones while giving things to man. God was always running on those stones and could reach all the people that way. However, the whites, through some crooked way, removed one of the stones on our side. When they removed the stone, God was unable to run back to our side of the mountain. That is why we are suffering like this and the whites are enjoying. That is why we have a long dry season and you people are always experience the rainy season.

Such perceptions, understandings, and classifications of whitemen and the origin of differences between white and black are not limited to West Africa. Bashkov explains that the perceived cultural presence of whitemen as a global phenomenon is not a historical accident. Whiteness is an "archetype of western modernity, wealth, and race privilege, personifying the legacy of imperialism, the ideal of development, and the force of globalization" (2006:2). Indeed, whiteness in Ghana also refers to more than just the color of one's skin. For example, as Bashkov also describes (2006), the common designation of "whiteman"—*obroni* (Twi) or *solmiya* (Nankana)—used for foreigners is also used to describe African American visitors, much to their chagrin.

The meanings of these designations run deeper than strict conceptions of racial characteristics or as a way to describe and position strangers. The term solmiya signifies an individual with material or economic resources, whether it is candy for a child or access to development funds. Solmiya reflects local understandings of modernity, development, privilege, and power in its various guises, as well as social and economic changes, all of which are intertwined within the local construction of race (Bashkov 2006:9). Solmiya also signifies privilege and emphasizes inequality. It is symbolic of modernity and the existential disjuncture between a local person's desire for the future and the reality of what is given (Jackson 2005).

Solmiya is also frequently associated with transience and impermanence. Children and some adults did not use my name until I had been within the community for several months. The shift from "solmiya" to "Aaron" signified a shift from complete stranger status, or that of a transitory whiteman, to an initial association and positioning within local understandings of personhood.

The physical differences between my body and that of my friends and community members were a frequent topic of conversation. These conversations were not necessarily about skin color, but the integrity and strength of the physical body and how ecological conditions affect it. The most common comment was about the lack of scars on my body and the absence of calluses on my hands, clearly illustrating the fact that I have not had to engage in hard physical labor to earn a living and that I was able to live a life of modern conveniences.

While talking one afternoon, the owner of a local establishment remarked on our differences, "So you know, Aaron, God made you special."

"What?" I replied, "God made solmiya special? Why?"

"It's the conditions," the AfriKids program manager, Joe cut in.

The business owner continued, "Everything, look at your body. Ours have scars all around."

"No, no," I argued showing him the few scars I had accumulated, but the owner and Joe only laughed.

"Even the weather favors you," Joe said.

"Yes," the owner added. "God made the good conditions for you, your weather and our weather are not the same."

Asingiya acknowledged on another occasion, there were considerable differences between our bodies, skin color, the weather, and that there was a drastically unequal distribution of resources. "But," he added, poking me in the stomach, "inside we are all the same. We all have the same blood."

White Medicine

Traditionally, black medicine (herbs and sorcery) has been the primary method used to treat a variety of illnesses and conditions, addressing not only physical but also spiritual causes. Modernity has brought new forms of medicine and healing. While modern biomedically oriented forms of healing are being integrated into local modes, they remain understood in relation to the Nankani cultural meanings of medicine and whitemen.

Medicines brought by white people are often associated with or understood as another form of sorcery medicine, as elements regarding how medicines work are hidden and not completely understood. Historically, whitemen have been associated with medical powers. When Fortes conducted his fieldwork in the 1930s he commented that the Tallensi consider the whiteman to have "wondrous powers and knowledge" and special medicines (Fortes 1949:20). A man told me: "The whiteman also has juju, he has the power. Because you have powers like that you can treat so many things." The association of white people with healing is not an accident, since there is a strong presence of various foreign NGOs and researchers addressing health concerns in the region. The whiteman is often synonymous with medicine and healing.

The discourse concerning the impact of the colonial presence often includes descriptions of how vaccinations have helped people. Older community members describe how measles were a significant source of concern for families. Asorigiya explained that measles "was very severe. It could kill you or make you blind. Because of that [the severity], the whiteman was able to bring medicine for it. These days it is not occurring again."

Many foreign aid workers in the region carry medical kits, which emphasize not only the difference in their body's ability to cope with the environment, but also their connection to healing resources and cures that are not available in the region. One afternoon a man, upon seeing my medical kit, requested some acetaminophen. Soon the others around also asked for a tablet or two, despite the fact that there were several blister packages around the office or nearby in the pharmacy. Later I understood how these medicines, because they were purchased overseas, were regarded as being more powerful or pure when compared to what was locally available, although in this case the drug was purchased at the local pharmacy. My medical kit and its contents became the subject of numerous requests for medicine to cure everything from malaria to muscle pains and hernias. Despite my lack of medical skills, locals regarded me as having significant medical knowledge and curative powers.

Before returning to the United States, I was asked by many friends and informants to bring back medicines or cures for various ailments. One man wanted a cure for his alcoholic family member, another wanted help for what was causing his jaundice. Believing that the United States had the knowledge and power to cure anything, few would accept my claims that there were no medicines providing instant cures for all illness, particularly alcoholism. Few believed me. Regarding the spirit child specifically, communities expected white medicine to cure them and they had high expectations for treatment. "We know that the whiteman has some medicine for the spirit child. That is why we are asking about it."

The Cost of Social Change

> Today Sirigu is moving forward. We are now developing. In the olden days, whenever we saw the whiteman we ran away. Now even you are coming, we can sit together and talk. We can talk with the whiteman, it means that we are moving forward.

Although development within the community of Sirigu is perceived as moving forward, the community discourse concerning whitemen indicates that development has also come at a cost. There is some concern, particularly among elders, that highly desired modernization and support will result in a continued loss of spirits, social structure, and traditional sources of knowledge. For example, the sound of the gun has scared away the animals and driven helpful spirits further into the bush, and traditional forms of justice have also been lost, resulting in less respect and an "increase in theft." An elder remarked that the sacrifices and traditional way of managing misfortunes such as poor harvests or illness are less common. Asorigiya stated:

> There is always an elder within the community who sacrifices to the ancestors. But these days, with the coming in of the whiteman, people are leaving all those things. Maybe it is because of that—well, I'm not blaming the whiteman for why some people may have left their old ways and are following a different way. It's not the whiteman who is causing the people to leave their ways, but it is the people who have left their own ways and are following the whiteman. This is why many of the misfortunes are happening.

The impact of modernity on traditional religion and spiritual events has been significant. The discourse on the whiteman has become metaphorical for modernity and the social spiritual changes occurring within the Nankani landscape. Spirits like the kulkariga have been sent into hiding due to "fear" of the white people. It was described to me on several occasions that before the whiteman came, the "wonderful" things that were a result of traditional powers, the oracles, the spirits, were all working well. "Because the whiteman has come," remarked one man, "all those powerful things are not working again. Now they are running away. They fear the whiteman so they leave. We are now powerless. These things are not practiced; it's because of the whiteman."

Indeed, the whiteman, or specifically, the consequences of colonialism, and the spoils as well as the problems associated with globalization and modernity are resulting in an epistemological shift. The bush and its spirits were a significant source of new knowledge. With the disappearance of both bush spaces and the spirits, the community is experiencing a change in how new knowledge is acquired and understood. With the coming of modernity, the source of new knowledge and experiences are still regarded as being "out there." But "out there" is no longer the bush, it's overseas. The consequences of the presence of whitemen or development have not only driven tradition and the spirits away, but may also have a negative affect on the local sense of community efficacy.

Efficacy and Humiliation

> When the Whiteman came there were things that we were doing that were *not good.* There are certain things that were happening in the old days, like the spirit child, but now they are not happening. What they have brought—the medicine they have brought—is very good.

When referring to the traditional protocols and treatment for the spirit child, a ritual specialist remarked: "Things are not being done in the proper way these days. That's why they see the whiteman here." These quotes have at least one element in common: the speakers state that the way things were done before "was not good." These remarks and other similar statements expressed an element of perceived inefficacy and sometimes even shame surrounding local practices. They comprise part of a discourse that includes self-deprecating comments regarding the "backwardness" of local knowledge and a recognition that outsiders have found many local practices unacceptable. Such perceptions may contribute to notions regarding how the coming of the whitemen drove the traditional powers away. In a sense they did, whitemen did drive traditional powers away by branding them as ineffective or primitive.

As Bashkov demonstrates, it was under colonialism that the colonized began to suffer "the humiliation of being told they were 'backward' in contrast to whites' 'advancement'" (2006:10). Indeed, the process described by Bashkov did not stop with the dissolution of colonial powers. In many respects, international aid as well as government health programs, despite many good intentions, directly or indirectly emphasize and reinforce how "far behind" locals are, how poor their health is, or how their primitive traditional practices are harmful.

I am not claiming that biomedical, health and environmental or other development interventions be discontinued. However, I want to emphasize the importance of recognizing the effect of persistent behavioral or technological intervention that directly or indirectly communicates to people that their beliefs, practices, and traditions are embarrassing, inadequate, or harmful. If educational campaigns and interventions are not shame producing then they are at least humbling. For example, having outsiders arrive in your community and tell you that the way you have been toileting since time immemorial is incorrect or uncivilized and that you must use a latrine has consequences despite the best intentions of improving local health and hygiene. Local people are eager to accept any form of aid and are rarely resistant to suggestions to improve health outcomes. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that if it is not shameful to ask for or accept help, it may at least be a humbling process to be told that your community is "behind" or obviously unable to solve its issues alone.

Self-deprecating comments offer further evidence. For example, referring to a collection of broken plastic chairs lying nearby, one local man blamed Ghana for its inability to make a proper chair on its own. His reasoning did not implicate a lack of resources or political-economic forces; rather, he blamed it on "stupidity." He stated, "We cannot even help ourselves, or make a simple chair properly." Comments such as these suggest an internalized attitude that, if not explicitly expressed by outsiders, is implied or imposed through experiences with development activities. Unfortunately, I found such evidence of negative self-perception to be frequent.

Community members look externally for new knowledge and help, but this outward focus has resulted in their reinforcing the message that local practices and beliefs are inadequate or harmful and, in a sense, invalidating not only spirits but the collective spirit as well. This is an often-unrecognized effect of many development approaches. Development projects must make certain to strengthen community efficacy, and recognize and incorporate local practices and understandings into new forms of knowledge and practice that benefit communities. It is positive to note that some NGOs in the region are working from a community-directed model that addresses the issues communities—not large foreign governing institutions—determine to be important.

Ambiguous Boundaries: Finding White Maggi

Products of the Nestle Corporation, Maggi brand seasonings are commonly used in a wide variety of West African dishes. The most common Maggi products in northern Ghana are the various flavors of bouillon cubes, from chicken and shrimp to goat. Though most Maggi products received very little mention among community members, one particular type of Maggi seasoning, the White Maggi, was the scathing subject of various conversations in different contexts. Such scorn for such a simple flavoring initially confused me. After I heard it mentioned in several interviews I conducted, I began to ask friends about what it was.

"Cynthia," I asked one evening. "Tell me about the White Maggi."

She responded with laugher, "Oh, Mr. Aaron, you don't want it! It's bad! It will make you sick!"

"But, what is it?" I questioned.

"Some people put it in their food," she said laughing as she walked back into the kitchen. "When they start eating it they can't stop!"

A month later, White Maggi came up again during an interview. While driving back to Sirigu after visiting a nearby family I asked Mathew to tell me more.

"What does it taste like?" I asked.

"It is very sweet," Mathew responded. "You know, it will cause sickness in your body. Some of us are Maggi children. We don't grow properly. When we were children, we used to say that when the whiteman came he would wash his clothes in it."

My confusion grew. The various things associated with White Maggi were baffling: White Maggi, whiteman, sweetness, clothes washing, seasoning, stunting growth, insatiable appetites? I filed all this in the back of my mind.

Several weeks later, during a community meeting regarding maternal health, a woman commented during a discussion on things that are dangerous for pregnant women to eat: "In the old days it was different. But these days the foods and drinks the women eat can cause the child to be malformed. Sometimes the White Maggi is put inside of food. It's sweet and causes other sicknesses in the body. The White Maggi can extract the blood or water from the child, and it may become deformed or have other problems."

The references to White Maggi's sweetness added to my confusion. I knew that White Maggi was some sort of seasoning, but I didn't think that the Maggi brand made "sweet" seasonings. Was it sugar or an artificial sweetener? I also wondered what White Maggi's connection to whitemen and modernity was, since it was obviously brought to Ghana by outsiders. Finally, were all these associations with White Maggi simply a rumor? Even if they were, they still had to have some significance, as Kapferer notes, "Rumors do not take off from the truth but rather seek the truth" (1987:3 in White 2000:84). If it was a rumor, what sort of truths was White Maggi seeking?

A month before my fieldwork ended White Maggi appeared in another interview, unprompted. This time, I took advantage of the opportunity to ask more questions. That afternoon, Ayanobasiya, Mathew, and I were sitting beneath some trees in the shade and talking about food, specifically the changes and differences in the types of foods Ayanobasiya had seen throughout her life.

"There haven't been that many changes," she said. "In our days the ingredients we used to prepare our foods would always give us the proper nutrients. But these days we now go to buy things at market. The Maggi, the white one, these days people always buy those things to prepare the food. Now when we eat those things, we realize that there are other diseases that we get. In my days, we would find the *dawa-dawa* and prepare it with food. When we eat, it is okay for us."

I ignored everything else she stated and fixed on the White Maggi. "That White Maggi you mentioned, is it just those bouillon cubes?"

Mathew, recognizing my fascination with White Maggi, cut in, "I think that when we get to the market later we'll have to find them."

"No," replied Ayanobasiya. "You won't be able to get them. They only sell them secretly. Those who go to buy them, they know where. They know the signs, so when they go to the market they will see those signs and get it."

It sounds like sorcery, I thought to myself. I asked, "People think it's bad for them, but they eat it anyway and it tastes good?"

Mathew replied, "When you put it inside of food, it tastes very nice, very sweet. But, it's ruining us, it's causing…"

"You mean it's making you sick?" I interjected.

"You'll easily fall sick," said Mathew.

Ayanobasiya added, "It can make you easily lose your eyesight. I have eye problems. Sometimes I can't see well. When I close one eye like this, I can't even see you."

"Mmm," I replied, and then asked. "Where do they make it? Is it made in Ghana or brought from Nigeria or some place?"

"That thing, I don't know where it's from," Mathew replied and retold his story about how the whitemen used it to wash his clothing.

"So," I asked, "Maggi can cause eye problems?"

"Yes" they both replied, and the conversation moved away from White Maggi and my mystery surrounding it remained. Although I would occasionally ask for it, I never saw White Maggi in the market, but I was preoccupied with other dimensions of my research and never looked very hard. However, I was still curious about it: Why did so many people bring it up without prompting? What did it signify?

Upon finishing my fieldwork, I still wondered about White Maggi. After piecing some of the stories together, I managed to find that White Maggi probably was not sweet in the Euro-American sense. Locally, the flavor of sweetness indicates something is flavorful or savory, rather than sugary as others might assume. I learned this difference the hard way after lunch once afternoon when the cook asked if my fish was sweet and told her it was definitely not.

Based on my hunch about its flavor and the physical effects people spoke of, such as the eye problems that Ayanobasiya described, I had a feeling that White Maggi might be salt or monosodium glutamate (MSG). A thorough internet search confirmed that it was MSG; however, it revealed little else about White Maggi. I was still unclear about the meaning of the discourse surrounding it, such as child deformity and the whiteman's laundry. In a final halfhearted attempt involving the search criteria "MSG" and "laundry," I came across a brief journal article published by a Nigerian scientist examining the effects of MSG on the kidneys of rats. He states:

> In Nigeria, most communities and individuals often use monosodium glutamate as a bleaching agent for the removal of stains from clothes. There is a growing apprehension that its excellent bleaching properties could be harmful or injurious to the tissues and organs of the body (Eweka 2007:15).

Although I never saw anyone using White Maggi to launder or bleach clothing in Northern Ghana, this article did substantiate the possibility that MSG could be used to clean clothing. Mathew's story was not just grounded in rumor, moreover, this example shows that concerns around White Maggi are not "irrational" or couched purely in superstition.

Rumors surrounding food or white people in Africa are not an isolated occurrence. Luise White illustrates how rumors about white people and colonial powers have a long history of circulation throughout Africa. For example, in 1952 a rumor circulated in a northern Rhodesian newspaper reported that "the 'House of Laws' in London had decided to put poisoned sugar on sale for Africans… The poisoned sugar would cause stillbirths in women and make men impotent" (White 2000:84).

The meanings associated with whitemen and discourse concerning White Maggi reveals much more than the stain-fighting power of MSG when we position them within the larger cultural context. When examined within the local context we find that White Maggi is connected to themes concerning uncontrolled consumption, the power of "the hidden," reproductive problems, and the contravention of boundaries. I examine these areas.

First, I examine craving or consuming something in an uncontrolled manner. Consuming something to excess can be dangerous both physically and spiritually. In Sirigụ, family members warned a pregnant woman who frequented a pork kabob stand each market day that if she continued to eat so much pork her child would look like a pig. The women regarded her urges as uncontrollable and claimed that she needed to eat pork, and continued to do so despite the warnings and expressions of disgust from community members. Her unchecked cravings became subject to significant debate and discussion. For local families, uncontrolled craving and consumption have spiritual connotations and implications that are related to witchcraft, as witches crave human souls and often cannot control their consumptive urges. Earlier we saw how the witchcraft water trial illustrates how a witch cannot control her consumption of the specially treated water.

Numerous anthropologists have discussed witchcraft accusations, particularly how the discourse is linked to social and historical contexts (Geschiere 1997), to socio-economic transformations, perceptions and experiences of global forces (Comaroff & Comaroff 1993), and to local notions of modernity and consumption (Moore & Sanders 2001). Because of the link between uncontrolled consumption or consumptive urges, the desire to consume anything to excess is a dangerous and inappropriate behavior. Any substance that renders a person unable to control his or her urges, such as the insatiable cravings attributed to White Maggi, will be regarded with ambivalence, suspicion, and be associated with witchcraft or sorcery.

The parallels between White Maggi and witchcraft also include concerns about the "hidden" or concealed, two concepts also central to sorcery. All community members know what witches and sorcerers are, and possibly who they are, but their actual activities are not visible. Significant attention is directed towards monitoring and determining other people's concealed practices and intentions. A person can be attacked by sorcery or consume a sorcery substance without their direct knowledge. For instance, a jealous family member can place sorcery medicine in one's food.

Part of White Maggi's ambiguous status centers around concealment, since no one knows exactly what it is made of and it can be placed in your food without your knowledge, much like a sorcery substance. Consequently, it can intentionally or unintentionally be used against a person, resulting in an unusually "sweet" dish, unnatural and worrisome cravings, and a disruption of bodily boundaries.

The fact that White Maggi can be used in food and to clean one's clothing is significant. This use of a non-food substance for a food related purpose (or vice versa) contributes further to White Maggi's ambiguous status. Specifically, if White Maggi has the power to clean clothing, or remove stains, what could it do to one's insides? Could it turn you *white* from the inside out? Could it cause a child to be born with deformity? Locally, we see that the physiological effects of White Maggi do not go unnoticed, particularly its effects on bodily substances. We see in the concern of a mother commenting on how it can extract blood or water from children. This concern is probably legitimized by the excessive thirst that can result from the consumption of MSG. The perceived effects that White Maggi has on the body are experienced and understood in reference to how the substance is used outside of the body. There are interesting similarities between the bleaching capabilities of MSG and the idea that the consumption of White Maggi may turn someone white from the inside out. This theme may have potential parallels with the loss of traditional forms and sources of knowledge and the spread of modernity.

The concerns surrounding White Maggi fit into a wider discourse concerning the differences and the meanings ascribed to whitemen. Whitemen, unlike locals, are often associated with the ability to freely traverse boundaries such as those of space, time, kinship, and spiritual dangers or taboos. Due to their transgressive abilities, whitemen are also able to dwell within ambiguous circumstances or use and consume ambiguous substances (cf. Bashkov 2006).

Whitemen's ability to transgress local boundaries or violate local taboos with impunity make sense to the Nankani because of the particular space whitemen occupy as well as their mobility. The reasons for the whiteman's relative freedom rests within a local form of culturally relativistic thinking. That is, taboos and consequences for boundary violations are relevant only to those that live within and believe them. A woman remarked to me, "If you don't believe in the spirits, they won't hurt you. You are safe from these spiritual things because you're not from here."

The local perception of my ability to move between boundaries with apparent ease was expressed during my involvement in the reenactment of a spirit child ceremony. After handling a ritual object and tasting a sample of a particular medicine during the ritual, a man who was curiously watching my activities commented with a degree of amazement and disbelief saying, "These people, they fear nothing."

Understanding the meanings of whitemen among the Nankani is an important bridge to understanding not only their historical and contemporary experiences, but also self-other relationships, conceptions of personhood, local epistemologies, bodily boundaries, and perceptions of modernity. White Maggi itself is an example of how a local understanding that initially appears as a myth or random quirk reveals, upon closer examination, a web of meanings, experiences and relationships that illustrate important themes in Nankani life.

Concluding Thoughts

This chapter covers a broad territory, moving from traditional notions associated with the bush spaces—its diverse entities, its ambiguity, and its use as a source of knowledge—to that of modernity and new sources of knowledge and power. Colonialism and the changes resulting from modernity are associated with the disappearance of spirits and traditional forms of knowledge. This disappearance has not left a vacuum, however, as notions of the bush are now expanding and increasingly becoming transnational. As the spirits disappear, new ambiguous characters (whitemen) emerge with similar characteristics—the abilities to offer new knowledge or the power to harm. The hunters of today, rather than encountering spirits as in the past, are searching for and encountering modernity, development, and new notions of risk.

The spirit child phenomenon is at the intersection of traditional understandings regarding the house and bush—namely the need to manage threats confronting the house and maintain boundaries between domestic and bush spaces—with the ever emerging modern notions of risk, child development, and biomedicine. Having explored the context of the Nankani house and bush spaces and how divination is a mediator and meaning-maker between those spaces, the following chapter engages these domains in its description of the spirit child phenomenon in discourse and in practice.

CHAPTER 6

Spirit Child Accounts: Myth, Discourse, and Practice

"What is a spirit child? It is a child that has a large head, is born with teeth or a beard, spies on its parents, and vanishes when the parents are not looking. Sometimes when you give birth, you don't know you have given birth to it. A woman who gives birth, continuously falls sick, and doesn't appear to get well has given birth to a spirit child."

"The spirit child is a snake. It can kill the father, mother, or cause the mother not to give birth again. It is supposed to be in the bush. If the spirit child is a boy, it tries to kill the father so it can have the mother and take over the house."

"In our tradition, if a woman drops food while walking on the road while eating, and if a spirit comes to pick it up, the woman is likely to give birth to a spirit child. The spirits are always in the bush eating. During the rainy season, when we are about to sow, they come around the houses, so if there is a woman around eating they are likely to pick the food."

"It was just in the olden days of the ancestors, if the child grows sick or lean then they say that such a child is a spirit child, and they will send the child away. But now, if a child is sick, they can send for treatment. There is no spirit child."

"A spirit child is just about people's way of thinking; they don't have a clear cut way of thinking. They don't actually understand the circumstances of nature, that is why they say it is a spirit child."

"Christianity will play a larger role in that. Most parents who have strong Christian beliefs do not believe in the spirit child. They know it is a deformity, the child cannot walk; that is how God made the child."

Introduction

"Many folklorists posit that myths must concern ultimate truths and issues of explicitly cosmological significance" (Gottlieb 1992:98).

This chapter brings together the myths, stories, and reported practices that comprise the spirit child phenomenon. My objective is to provide insight into local descriptions and understandings of the spirit child, and to offer evidence that permits a deeper examination of the spirit child practice and the Nankani sociocultural world. Many of the accounts I present in this chapter may seem untrue or even fantastic, but debating the validity of these accounts is not related to the purpose of this project. Rather, I emphasize that these stories do have validity or "truth" in the sense that they express and shape such individual and group experiences of misfortune, disability, and boundary transgressions.

From the perspective of the Nankani, spirit children are bush spirits that can be born into a family as a spirit masquerading in human form. Although they appear human, spirit children are not human beings and are not regarded as persons in the Nankani sense. Early in my research, I inquired if it was possible to exorcise the spirit from a spirit child. Community members told me (usually while laughing) that it would be impossible because the spirit child is not a human being possessed by a spirit. There is no spirit-body dualism; the spirit child is just a spirit, inseparable from its embodied form.

While in the bush the spirit child actively searches for any possible way to enter a family. The spirit wants to enter the family because, as one man remarked, "there are certain things in the house they desire." The spirit will exploit weakness in the boundaries of the family to enter the house to gain access to the "good things" a family provides, such as food and care. The second objective of the spirit child is to take over the house and destroy the family, breaking it apart through conflict, sickness, and death. These two goals of the spirit child appear in various forms throughout this chapter.

This chapter presents a broad range of discourse and description on the spirit child. Some accounts within this chapter may differ or appear contradictory, since each family has a unique conception of the spirit child. In fact, the differences between people's understandings of the spirit child and the practices surrounding it emphasize how the spirit child is enmeshed within a complex web of family and community relationships. Therefore, the unique beliefs and experiences surrounding spirit children are adapted to and taken from understandings of these social relationships. The following accounts are from the Sirigu and Kandiga areas within the Eastern Sub-district. Undoubtedly, many of the stories and themes that appear here are similar to the surrounding Gurenne- and Kassem-speaking communities. Likewise, some characteristics and practices will differ.

I begin by describing two key agents in the spirit child process, the *dongo* and the concoction man. The subsequent section presents a series of narrative accounts regarding spirit children in either human or spirit forms. These accounts express several themes and concerns important to community members. The final section describes ways in which community members identify and treat spirit children that have crossed the boundary from the bush into the house.

The Dongo

The *dongo* or "horn" is the ritual, spiritual and medicinal object used by a concoction man to send a spirit child back to the bush. The term "dongo" signifies the black medicine or concoction used to kill the spirit child, the spiritual power present within the concoction, and the object—the dongo—itself. The dongo consists of a six to eight inch cow horn encased in chicken feathers affixed to it with dried blood. Older and well-used dongos are as large as soccer balls due to the numerous feathers from the sacrifices offered to it. A small rope attached to the dongo allows it to hang within a house or around the concoction man or spirit child's neck. The term dongo also describes smaller horns, which act as containers for other types of medicinal treatments. People hang these medicines around their neck for protective purposes.

The dongo is passed between generations. A concoction man describes the origins of the dongo. "Our grandfathers sent a cow to a place where someone had the medicine for the dongo and we were able to get it. The reason they sent a cow was to save humankind. They sent the cow to get the medicine to save human beings." All concoction men described the dongo and its knowledge as coming directly from the ancestors, "If they ever experienced disease or a spirit child situation they used the dongo and it worked."

The dongo has a "mouth" located at the opening to the inside of the hollow cow horn. This mouth has both metaphorical and functional purposes. It stores the medicine used to treat the spirit child. The mouth, however, also eats. The dongo requires food sacrifices to encourage and reward it for its work. It prefers fowls, but also eats goats, other local food staples, and drinks pito. The concoction man feeds the dongo each time it "catches" a spirit child and occasionally throughout periods of inactivity when no spirit children are reported. These maintenance feedings are necessary to maintain its loyalty and to prevent the dongo from striking out in anger against its owner or leaving him.

Concoction men often describe the dongo as being vindictive and temperamental. If you abuse or improperly handle the dongo it can kill you or, in some families, send you a spirit child. A concoction man describes such a situation. "The dongo can let people give birth to a spirit child. Then it will kill that one and make you give birth to a spirit child again. Kill it and cause it again. It does these things to get something to eat." The concoction man communicates with the dongo through divination. The dongo also facilitates communication with a spirit child. Ayisoba remarked, "When things become critical the spirit child talks through the dongo. So when I go to a soothsayer, I can hear what the spirit child wants."

Although the concoction man can direct the dongo to treat spirit children, the dongo is relatively autonomous. Its employment for purposes other than treating spirit children is limited. Its owner cannot summon the dongo's power to send a spirit child to another family or harm someone. The only non-spirit child use of the dongo that I recorded is to protect crops or a woman's vegetable plot. If a woman applies medicine from the dongo to her crops, anyone who steals from her will give birth to a spirit child. A woman who has given birth to a spirit child is able to use this power to protect her vegetables.

The concoction men describe and compare the dongo's behaviors to that of a hunting dog. "The dongo is like a dog. It normally goes out to catch food. When a hunter goes out with the dog, it normally catches the meat." The dongo goes out to search like a hunting dog for spirit children, and is able to direct a family with a spirit child to the concoction man's house through spiritual means.

There are important reasons why the dog is a good candidate to catch spirit children. Traditionally, hunters used specially trained dogs to hunt for game in the bush. Dogs were well suited for this task, in part because of their ability to see invisible spirits, their invulnerability to spirits, and their ability to warn and protect humans from seen and unseen dangers. Ayisoba remarked that when you see a dog running after something it may have actually seen a dangerous spirit and is following it. In her work with the Beng people, Gottlieb also remarked that spirits feared dogs and that hunting dogs scare away spirits (1992:103).

Community members regard some animals, dogs in particular, with ambiguity due to their ability to cross between bush and domesticated places, traversing between spiritual and human worlds. Dogs also live within the house but leave it to "roam" about the bush. Dogs have social networks and other human-like characteristics, but also behave like "wild animals" at times. Accordingly, using a hunting dog to describe the dongo makes sense, since the dog is immune to spiritual powers and has the ability to move between the house and the bush with ease.

Each concoction man uses the dongo according to his family's tradition. While there are some fundamental similarities between them, the specific procedures associated with the dongo's use differ. When treating a spirit child most of the concoction men use a combination of the black medicine held within the dongo mixed with an infused herbal tea-like preparation. The black medicine is prepared from a variety of burnt herbs mixed with shea oil. Some concoction men use only the black medicine to treat the child, and often more in a symbolic sense. For example, the amounts of black medicine given to the child are small, and in some cases the child does not ingest the medicine at all. Despite the variations in its use, concoction men agreed that the black medicine was not solely responsible for the death of spirit children; rather, the deadly power also rests within the dongo itself.

Two concoction men did not use any herbs to treat the child. They simply poured water over the dongo, collected it in a calabash, and administered it to the child. A concoction man stated, "It is not about the medicine, it is about the power of the dongo.

When the water flows around the dongo, its power makes the child pass away. The power goes inside of the water. If it is a spirit child, then it has to die." Other community members described several cases where the dongo simply touched or was held near the child and it died. The recognition that concoction men may use an insignificant amount of "poison," if any at all, while treating spirit children emphasizes the question posed in the introductory chapter: What are the causes of death in spirit children? I elaborate upon this question throughout this and the following chapters.

As my fieldwork progressed, I observed that the dongo was becoming hungrier and making more demands upon AfriKids. During the monthly concoction man association meetings hosted by AfriKids, the concoction men increasingly indicated that the dongo required additional sacrifices. A frequent comment was, "The dongo, as it's hanging, is always testy and hungry. When you come by you have to give it something." In fact, over a period of eight months the dongo went from only requiring an occasional sacrifice to needing monthly sacrifices. The concoction men explained that, "The dongo is going to harm. It will not harm AfriKids, not anybody. It will harm us." From one perspective, it became clear that the dongo also desired the spoils of development and modernity and shifted its needs accordingly. The needs as expressed by the dongo and the discourse surrounding it were illustrative of the concoction men's expectations, individual needs, and desires. While the concoction men were uncomfortable directly making demands from AfriKids, the dongo occupied a space that permitted the concoction men to express their desires in the socially appropriate indirect manner.

The Concoction Man

The concoction man, or *dongodaana* (pl. *dongodanduma*), is the ritual specialist with the power and authority to use the dongo and the skills necessary to send spirit children back to the bush. "A concoction man is a human being like anyone else," one reported. "It's just that he is the one that holds the dongo. If anyone has a spirit child he is the one they will go and notify and he will use the dongo to treat the child." The literature has portrayed soothsayers as concoction men (cf. Allotey & Reidpath 2001). A soothsayer is not a concoction man and does not have the powers of a concoction man; however, a concoction man can be a soothsayer. Two concoction men I met who were also soothsayers identified a clear separation between those two roles. A soothsayer does not give the concoction.

The dongo passes from generation to generation within a family. A concoction man will inherit the dongo from his grandfather, father or paternal uncle after their final funeral rites are performed. Having a spirit child is the most frequent requirement needed to inherit the dongo. If a concoction man dies and there is no one in the family who has had a spirit child, the dongo will hang until a family member has one. Due to this requirement, most of the concoction men have experienced not only the loss of a child, but also the loss of a close family member due the spirit child's maliciousness. A concoction man explained that after the death of his wife and child the dongo, "Chose me to use it. If it doesn't choose you and you try to learn it you can die." Although passed intergenerationally, the dongo is not an ancestral power specifically. The ancestors may watch over and protect the concoction man as he works, but the dongo's power does not rest with the ancestors. Its characteristics are more akin to sorcery powers.

A person learns how to become a concoction man by doing, either by helping an elder use it to treat spirit children or by performing the rites when it comes time to take it over. Many of the older concoction men have a son who is their assistant and representative, since they themselves are too old to travel and use the dongo. Despite their powerful and ambiguous status within communities, the concoction men are quite humble about their skills and clearly believe that the dongo holds the power. "The concoction man is just someone who is using the dongo." They view their job as essential in helping people and their community. One concoction man remarked, "We have been using the dongo for the health of children, for the benefit of all people."

Accounts of the Spirit Child

I present two longer myths and several short narrative accounts of people's experiences with spirit children. I chose to present these accounts without analysis to permit the reader to develop a closer understanding of the spirit child as expressed by the Nankani community. The analysis presented in the subsequent sections and chapters will work from these narratives.

1: A Creation Story

God created man and all the things on earth. Before making man, however, he first made the spirit beings. The woman was the next one he created, and later that same day he made man. God made the woman at one place in the forest and made the man in another. They didn't know each other. Where the woman was living, God also made a young girl and a dog. The woman, girl, and dog lived together.

After some time, the spirit children were able to locate the woman and the young girl. Many spirit children came to court the young girl. Some of them decided that they wanted to marry her and asked the woman for the hand of the girl in marriage. The woman didn't know what to do about the girl's suitors. Until then, she thought that she and the girl were alone on earth and that there were no other living beings. When the woman first saw the spirit children, she didn't even know that such things existed.

The dog advised the woman that she should tell the spirit children that if they wanted to marry the girl, they should court her by bringing guinea fowls each time they visited. The woman told the spirits this and they began bringing fowls.

One day the woman devised a plan to trick the spirits. She decided to cut the dog into two parts. One part would be the side with the head, and the other would be the side with the rear legs. When the woman cut the dog in half both parts turned into a woman. Now there were three girls: the proper girl and two from the dog cut in half. When the spirit children returned to visit they saw that there were now three women on earth. The woman gave them the two girls cut from the dog.

Later on, the man was roaming about the forest looking for honey. That is how he found where the women lived. The man was looking for honey up in the trees. Upon finding a hive, he climbed into the tree to get closer. That is when the woman saw the man. At the time the woman was the chief of all the land, she was very powerful, more powerful than the man. When the man saw the woman he was afraid of her, afraid that she would harm him. She approached the tree and asked the man what he was doing. The man replied that he was trying to find honey. The woman had never had honey before and asked if she could taste it. The man dropped some honey down for her to try, and she said it was good.

The woman asked what the honey was called and the man said it was *pugna-ba-panbarige*, meaning you use a stick to go inside the hole and move it around [stirring]. He said he had called the honey after that. He came down from the tree and told her that she should let him show her what he meant by pugna-ba-panbarige, and she did.

When the man slept with her the woman said that it was a very good thing. Because of that, she decided that the man should stay at her house. He agreed. The woman built the house for the man so that they had a place to sleep. As she was building a house and the mud was still not dry, a goat walked by stepping in the mud. The woman asked God what was this thing that stepped in her mud. God told the woman that it was a *butila*, or "billy goat." The woman then gave birth to a son and she named it *budigla*, the "male child."

The woman told the man about the two other women living on earth, and that they were from a dog cut in half. Even today, there are women that when you marry them, they don't like to sit in one place. Before you realize it, they are roaming all over. Those are the women from the leg side of the dog. The mouth side of the dog is the women these days that are talking all the time. It is the women you see talking and gossiping too much.

One day the women lost their power over the men. It was the men that were coming to marry the women, not the women marrying the men. When you marry a woman you have to send fowls and other things to her family. It's not proper that I, the one sending these things to a woman, should allow the woman to come and rule over me. The men could not allow the women to rule them. That is why the women have lost their control over men.

2: The Spirit Child and the Funeral

There was a man who had many children that he loved very much. The man asked his eldest son, "When I die what will you do for me? Will you perform the funeral very well?"

"Of course," the younger son replied. "When you die, I will use a real human being for you to rest your head upon. I will bury a woman first and place you on top of her."

The father said, "Can that be possible?"

The son said, "Yes, it's possible."

When the father died, the son, wanting to fulfill his vow, traveled to another village to court a woman he had his eye on. She was a very beautiful woman. He talked to the woman and her parents and they agreed that he should be her husband. And so it was. She followed him back to his house with his friends. They were dancing and singing as they walked along the path towards home. Back at his house, the family was preparing to bury his father, but the woman didn't know this.

The group was dancing and singing as they walked down the path and entered the bush. Deep in the bush there was a spirit child cooking some beans. He was boiling his beans. As the beans boiled they were making a great deal of noise. Burbling, burbling, burbling. The beans were very hot and were jumping. The spirit child said to the beans, "You should stop making noise. I say you should stop! I want to listen to something outside." But the beans kept boiling and he said, "Aaughh! These beans are still making noise." Gurgle, google, gurgle. So the spirit child stood, picked up the pot of hot beans and threw the pot down. Bam! The pot broke and he began stomping on the beans. They were finally silent.

He saw the wedding procession coming down the path and decided to join them as they passed. He ran along behind, singing and dancing as spirit children like to do. As the procession neared the house the woman could see that a burial was occurring and the family was preparing to lower the body into the grave. The son instructed his new wife to dance in the front of the group and lead them to the house, but she hesitated. The spirit child, not missing an opportunity, took it upon himself to jump in front of the procession and lead it in song and dance to the father's grave. The woman started to suspect that this man was not planning to marry her.

When the procession reached the graveside, the family members asked the woman to go inside the grave to help inter the father's body. The woman took a step forward but refused to enter. The spirit child thought that she didn't know how to properly receive the body, so he quickly—you know how fast spirit children are able to do things—jumped into the grave to show her. "It is like this," he said as he lay down inside. The family members recognized it was a spirit child in the grave and quickly put the father's body on top of the spirit child, knocked it on the head with a stick, and hastily covered the grave with sand to keep him from escaping and causing problems. They used a spirit child in place of the human being to fulfill the son's obligation. The woman was lucky that the spirit child accidentally saved her life.

3: My Brother's Spirit Child

My elder brother and his wife gave birth to a spirit child. After the mother gave birth to the child it refused to breastfeed. It wasn't crying or doing anything. The mother was very sick, lying down and even crying. They went to the soothsayer house and saw it was a spirit child. We brought the concoction man, prepared the concoction for the child to drink, and it died.

4: Disappearing Act

Sometimes when you take your child to the bush or out to the farm, you leave it with its elder sister while you go and weed. If the child is a spirit child, other spirit children nearby can take it away. When they take the child away, you can roam and search for the child but you won't find it. This even happened to a woman near my house. They searched for the child and couldn't find it for many days. They finally found the child on a nearby hill. The child was alive sitting on top of some rocks. The women brought the child back to the house, but it was acting strange and misbehaving, just laughing all the time. It died soon after they found it.

5: The Gift

One day a woman was walking with her child and came to a tree with fruit. The child wanted some of the fruit, but the mother said those things are not for her. At that time, there was a spirit child standing on top of the tree. When it heard the woman, it told her she should pluck some of the fruit for the child. "They are for everyone," it said. When the woman plucked the fruit and gave it to her child to eat, the spirit started complaining that she should put it back or else there might be a problem. The mother didn't know what to do. That's why some people say these days, if you really give something to somebody you can't tell the person to give it back again. If you do they will ask, "Are you a spirit child?"

6: The Sore

There is another child that I have seen. The child developed a sore on its leg that would not go away. They tried treating the child for many years, but the sore remained. Later, they realized the child was going to destroy the family so they had to bring the concoction man to kill it. They knew that killing the spirit child was the only treatment.

7: The Fowls

The spirit child is like this example. My mother gave birth to a child. Just by looking at this child nobody believed that it could survive. Then some strange things started happening in the house. All the fowls in the house disappeared. We went to the soothsayer and discovered that it was a spirit child and was eating all the fowls in the house.

8: The Beans

At my uncle's house there was a child there that could not walk, it could only crawl. In the night while everyone was sleeping the child was able go across the compound to a different room. The child stood up next to a covered pot with bambara beans, opened the lid and ate the beans in there. An old man walked by and saw the child. The child cannot walk, how is it able to get there? Because of that, they knew immediately, the child was a spirit child.

9: The Discovery

A mother placed her child down in a room and left the house to do something. As she was leaving the house she realized that she forgot something in her room and went back. When she entered the room, she found the child standing and opening a large pot of millet to eat. When the child saw her it said, "*Fom n'peligoho*!"—you have discovered my secret. Then the child fell down, started crying, and died immediately.

10: The Groundnuts

There was a child in our house who couldn't walk. When it was time to harvest groundnuts the family put all the nuts inside a large pot. The child who could not walk saw the pot and went over to attempt to open its lid. It fell from the pot and started crying. The mother called everyone to come and see what a child who could not walk was doing. How did it get there? It wanted the groundnuts. That child was actually a spirit child. It doesn't want the groundnuts for itself alone, it wanted to take them to the other spirit children in the bush.

11: The Elders

There was something strange happening in this house. In the family, the eldest family member inherits the house; he is the family head. In this one house, however, if anyone became that elder, he would always die. They went to the soothsayer and found out that there was an abnormal person in the family causing that. The family called a very powerful concoction man that also had a lot of juju. When he walked to the house, you could hear him coming as there were so many things hanging on his body. As he approached, the abnormal man responsible for the deaths went into the room and started crying. When the concoction man arrived, he went straight to the room with the dongo. By the time he opened the dongo where the man was lying, the man began confessing that he killed many people, that he had done all the bad things in the family. The man said that if they were coming to kill him they are supposed to kill five cows to send his spirit away. If they did not, the family would never have peace. The concoction man added the water to the black medicine and gave it to the man. The man just lay there and died. Later, some family members came to dump his body in the bush. When they went to consult the soothsayer three days later, they discovered that the spirit wanted to kill the next eldest person in the house and that they must give him all the necessary things—those five cows—to make it stop. They didn't want to give. The family brought a concoction man and a sorcerer to the house to intercede and the spirit child did not harm them again.

12: The Hidden Spirit Child

There was a child at our house. When the child was born there, we had so many animals. However, because of the child all the animals in the house died. Later the child died on its own. When they went to bury the child it refused to be buried. It said it was a spirit child and that it was for the bush [via divination]. So they had to send the child to the bush for burial. They couldn't bury him like a human being [with other family members].

13: The Hill

I live over here near the hill where they abandon spirit children. When I was a child (roughly 35 years ago), we would follow the animals as they grazed, watching over them. In those days there were so many spirit children that were abandoned. We saw so many of them. When they would dump them on the hill they wouldn't bury them in the earth. We would see the bodies lying on the hill. These days it's no longer so, because of the treatment we have for them. Back then, if a child was continuously sick they would go to the soothsayer's house to confirm that the child was supposed to go to the hill. Then the family found a concoction man to come and kill the child. If a mother died immediately after giving birth, they knew they couldn't take proper care of the child, so they would just go and kill that child immediately. When you say a child is a spirit child, it is serious. Because of the treatment that they have for the children, and because the women attend antenatal care, these days when you go to the hill you don't see dead spirit children any more.

14: A Broken Leg

I think the spirit children are getting more powerful these days. Last year I was going to a house to perform the burial. On my way home I fell down and broke my leg. I was laid up at home for almost three months. Then I went back out to treat another spirit child. On my way home I fell and broke my leg again. I don't know if the dongo's powers are protecting me or if the spirit children are getting too powerful!

15: It's About Sickness

In my house one woman had a child. It was three years old, couldn't walk and was making the mother sick. Her eyes couldn't see properly, they were always sick. They sent her to the hospital. Sometimes her eyes got better and sometimes they got worse. For those three years the child couldn't walk and didn't have teeth. At night when the child was sleeping with the mother, she would wake up to check on the child and see it was not there. The child would be gone. When it came back late at night it would start crying and everyone would wonder where the mother had gone. When they would check, they realized that the mother had not gone anywhere. They went to the soothsayer and discovered the child was a spirit child. The family decided to give the child the concoction to see. After taking the concoction the child immediately developed teeth. The mother was now afraid after seeing the teeth. They called the concoction man to come and finish the child, but it wouldn't die. The second concoction man was able to perform the ceremony properly, the way the spirit child wanted it, and it died. Later the mother gave birth to a boy. It too started behaving strangely and had a big head. People were saying that it's the same spirit child from before and that it had come back. But the mother said it wasn't the same, since it was a boy and the first was a girl. The family sent him to the hospital and the doctors said it wasn't a spirit child, it was about sickness.

16: The Disabled Woman

There was an old woman with grey hair at my house. She was disabled. Her hand was turned in and her leg was not properly formed. All the people died in the house where this woman was staying. They sent the woman to live at another house and the elder brother's wife died. They said that the old woman killed her. So they sent the old woman to another house again and another woman died. The family consulted a soothsayer and determined she was a spirit child. They also found that the tingane for the place that she was staying would not allow the spirit child to kill in its house again and that the tingane itself would kill her. The family didn't do anything to the woman and within a few days she died. The soothsayer said it was the tingane that killed her. When the dead woman's body was lying in the room, her eyes were open and very big, as if she was still alive. From the morning she died to the next day her eyes were like that. They still had to bring a concoction man to conduct the ritual. When they gave her the medicine, she began quickly opening and closing her eyes as if she were still alive. The woman's spirit finally left the next day. Since she was so big, they couldn't carry her all the way to the place where they normally abandon spirit children. So they dug a grave next to the house and buried her there. Three days later someone in the house died. They went to the soothsayer and found out that the old woman wanted to return to the bush. She didn't want to be buried there. So they dug her up and sent her to the bush.

17: The Old Woman

There was an old woman who was a spirit child. A very old lady. The family had to call a concoction man to come and give her the concoction to drink. When the concoction man was approaching, the old woman was inside grinding the millet flour. When she knew that a powerful person was coming she cried out, "There is something coming to get me." There was another woman inside with her watching this. The spirit child quickly ran out of the room. As she exited, the concoction man was waiting outside for her by the door. He said, "I've seen you, I've uncovered your secret, I've seen your wicked nature." When he said that she just fell down and died. He didn't even have to use the concoction. After she died they still gave her the concoction to send her spirit away.

18: On Top of the Room

I witnessed a spirit child. My younger brother had a child. When it was very small and could not walk or do anything, it started to cause problems for the family. It killed both the mother and the father. A family member that lived away from the house came to visit. When he walked into the house he saw the child, who could not walk, standing on top of the building and walking around. When the child knew the man saw him, he just fell down. That means that the man really saw the child, he'd seen what it was. The following day the man died.

19: I am a Spirit Child

My family believed that I was a spirit child when I was maybe four or five. They even brought the concoction man and gave me the medicine, but I didn't die. The family went to the soothsayer again and discovered that it was the pa-ala that I was missing. It was not given to me when I should have received it soon after I was born. So they gave me the pa-ala, a metal bracelet, and my mother was able to teach me how to walk. Now I am alive and strong. So if I died today, what will my family say? Am I a spirit child in the community? People will still condemn me, so I wanted to reveal myself to the people today. They will know that I am a spirit child.

20: The Dongo's Hungry

Years ago my wife gave birth and would not stop bleeding. The child died soon after it was born. I went to get herbs to treat my wife, but she too died. After that I went to the soothsayer and found that my wife had given birth to a spirit child. The reason was because my family had hung the dongo for a long time and never fed it. The dongo was angry and caused the birth to the spirit child.

21: Won't Stop Crying

I have witnessed my own wife give birth to a spirit child. My wife was very sick and just lying around. The child would cry all the time, even if it had breastfed already. It would cry until daybreak. I went around to the soothsayers and was able to determine that the child was a spirit child and did away with it.

22: It Even Has Teeth

I have had a spirit child. It was very serious. The day my wife gave birth to it she didn't sleep and was always sick. She told me that that the child is a spirit child but I didn't agree. She said, "Look, the child even has teeth!" I was able to follow the traditions and realized the child was a spirit child. The moment we did the ceremony and the child died my wife got better. We didn't even have to send her to the hospital.

23: The Good Spirit Child

There was a child near my house named Azaare. The family thought that he was a spirit child and even tried to kill him. Whenever the family would prepare t.z. (*tuo zaafi*, a staple food that is a thickened porridge ball made with millet flour) Azaare refused to eat it. He would only eat the vegetable soup. They said that such a child was a spirit child and brought four concoction men in to try to kill the child, but they were unable. Whenever the concoction men came I would always go to the house and watch. Each would prepare the concoction and give it to the child, but the child refused to die. By the time they found a fifth concoction man, one of the White Fathers came and took the child away. The family didn't want the child and freely gave it to the priest. The child is now grown-up and even moved to Kumasi and got married. There are good spirit children and there are bad ones. He was a good one. When he was living at that house they had so many animals and fowls. Now when you go to the house you won't see a single one.

24: He Threw the Dongo

(While laughing) A neighbor here had a spirit child. The concoction man came to the house and the child just took off running down the path. The concoction man took aim and threw the dongo at the child. The dongo hit the child and he fell down and immediately died.

25: Serious Consequences

There was a spirit child near our house who was a young man. The family knew that he was a spirit child and called a powerful concoction man to come and treat him. When the concoction man confronted him with the dongo, he started confessing all these things. That he was able to enter all the granaries in the area but one. He announced that he had intercourse with so many women before they were married to their husbands. Their husbands were not the first. You can imagine all the consequences. The spirit child even disclosed that he killed seven men and eight women in the house. That is why they are afraid here. It means that all woman married in those years had intercourse with the spirit child. There's much suffering that he has put upon us. That is why we are afraid. This spirit child was able to become an adult and look at everything he was able to do. So if AfriKids took a spirit child and he grows up and comes back to the family, the spirit can cause so many problems and still destroy.

26: There Were Many

I know a woman who has given birth to seven children and all of them were spirit children. I performed the ceremony on the last one several years ago. I still return to visit her. So far she has now given birth to four children who are not spirit children.

27: Not Traditional

My own brother was a spirit child actually. My mother had a difficult labor and my father was sick at the time. He had sores on his arm that were getting worse and were not going away. My father wanted to bring the concoction man, but my mother refused to believe my brother was a spirit child. My father wasn't even traditional. He may have been concerned about things. My mother and brother had to stay in the hospital for a few days. While they were there, my father told me to take my brother from the hospital and bring him to where he was with the concoction man. My mother refused to let me take the child.

Spiritual Appearance

In Nankani discourse, the physical appearance of the spirit child takes two forms. The most frequent accounts emphasize the spirit child's human form. Less frequent are discussions of its appearance and behaviors as a bush spirit. Descriptions of the bush spirit, the subject of this section, appear primarily in stories and myth.

Many of the characteristics attributed to the spirit child are similar to the kulkarsi, as the spirit child is also short or "dwarfish" in appearance and can move and run quickly. A man remarked, "The spirit child is fast in entering people. It is fast in getting all its things." Spirit children in the bush are generally invisible and only show themselves to people if necessary. A man described them as being, "Just like air. They are maybe even listening to what we are saying right now." While in spirit form, the spirit child has the ability to travel long distances. Families that have given a spirit child to an orphanage or another family expressed concern that sending the child away from home may not be enough, as its spirit can travel back to cause further misfortune. Ayisoba remarked, "Yes, it might be difficult for it to walk but the spirit will fly to the house!" During a community meeting sponsored by AfriKids, an elder remarked that the community would send any spirit children discovered to AfriKids, but that they remained afraid of the misfortunes and other consequences a living spirit child brings. The presence of such a child, even if it no longer resides with the family, remains a central concern.

Community members describe spirit children as impulsive, wise, crafty, and mischievous. In addition to causing numerous other misfortunes, the spirit will steal food, fowls, and other animals from humans to feed its friends and kin in the bush. Human children who display wisdom beyond their years are often thought of being spirit children. "How else would a child get such knowledge?"

Spirit children have a kin structure similar to humans and live together as a family in the bush. A concoction man remarked, "There is a very high hill in Burkina Faso. When you are looking there in the evening there's always fire on that mountain. There are spirit children living there and they are cooking. That is why we see the fire. They live together as a family." Spirit children also offer sacrifices. All community members are aware of where spirit children live. The most frequent abodes of spirit children are treed areas or on hillsides. The locations where the spirit children live are the same as the places where spirit children masquerading as humans are buried. People avoid these places.

Describing the Spirit Child

Community members define the spirit child based upon its physical appearance, its behaviors, and the misfortunes it causes. Family members express concern and focus their attention on the interplay between what the spirit child chooses to reveal to people and what it is able to hide. For example, a family might remark that a spirit child has chosen to reveal its physical abnormality, but may be hiding other destructive tendencies and is simply waiting for the right time to expose itself and destroy the family. Consequently, families that suspect a spirit child observe the child's behaviors closely to determine if it is revealing any other clues to its identity.

Like anywhere else in the world, families are acutely aware of children that fall outside of the locally determined understandings of "normal development." Nankani descriptions of a spirit child position the child outside such notions of physical and behavioral normality. A woman remarked, "Before someone can be called a spirit child, the child must not be like a normal child. There must be something wrong with that child." Families place significant emphasis on bodily integrity and boundaries. Additionally, families are conscious of developmental milestones. Failure to reach a specific milestone such as walking is a significant indicator.

Other physical characteristics indicative of a spirit child include an enlarged head due to encephalitis, being born with teeth or a beard, or having various physical disabilities such as misshapen or missing limbs. Possessing secondary sex characteristics when born is also alarming. There is significant concern regarding the eyes. A spirit child may look at you differently, have a wandering eye, or fail to make eye contact. Families interpret a child's failure to make eye contact as a fear of being looked at or evidence that the child is hiding something. As we will see in the following section, having any of these characteristics alone is not enough to condemn a child immediately. Other factors must be present.

While many children show physical characteristics leading families to suspect that they are a spirit child, some spirit children appear normal. Powerful spirit children remain hidden within the family and may reach late childhood or adulthood before being detected. Children that do not display overt physical or behavioral characteristics are regarded as more dangerous, since they can attack the family with little or no warning. A concoction man described this phenomenon:

> There are different types of spirit children. The one where they give birth to a child with teeth or pubic hair, or it has a part of the body that's big. Then there's the one that may not have any problems. This one will succeed in destroying the family because the child is hiding. The one with the teeth, it is easy, because we know it is a spirit child. But the one born as a normal human being is harder to identify. That is the one that may destroy the family.

Spirit children can be beautiful, one man told me. "The spirit child is not always an ugly person or an ugly child. It's not always somebody with a big head. A spirit child can be handsome or beautiful. It's about the behavior or the attitude, or what it does in the family." This quote highlights a central characteristic of a spirit child: its physical characteristics alone are not the only concern; behavior is a significant factor. A spirit child may simply refuse to breastfeed or may cry excessively. Other behaviors may be more extraordinary. A young man remarked, "The spirit child performs miracles in the form of evil acts and above human expectations … You may see a small child—a three-day-old baby—walking. That one is it. Under normal circumstances a three-day-old baby is not supposed to walk, it's not supposed to be eating groundnuts or any other foods."

A widespread concern is that the child will vanish when no one is watching. When describing what a spirit child does, a man stated, "The child will be sleeping with the mother and all of a sudden, the child will vanish." Another man remarked, "The spirit child is about the behavior of the child. That is how we normally detect it. When you have an infant that cannot walk, and it's lying at night sleeping with its mother, it can get up from the mat and stand or crawl away. When it comes back to sleep, it will cry and wake her up."

A child that cries excessively may indicate a spirit child is in the house. A woman explained that a spirit child is "A child who cries a lot in the night. And if you wake up, turn around and place you hand where it is sleeping and you don't see the child, it means it's a spirit child." Excessive nighttime crying is the most common complaint surrounding the spirit child beliefs. Families regard excessive crying as disruptive and indicative that the child wants to kill the mother and destroy the family. A woman explains:

> During the night the child goes out into the bush. When it comes back it will not lie down peacefully, it will just come in the room, settle on the mat, and start crying. When it cries the husband will ask the wife where she has gone and why she's not with the child. The wife will say that she's still sleeping and didn't go anywhere. Through that, the man will know that the child is doing something, or that the child has gone out. They start to think about those things and go to a soothsayer to find out.

The spirit child will trick family members in an effort to hide its identity or receive additional care. For example, a spirit child may feign illness or other physical problems in its effort to deceive. A diviner explained: "Those diseases are just ways of pretending. The sickness will not kill the child, yet the child can be sick for a long time. They are only pretending while they try to find a way to kill the parents. It is not actually sickness."

The presence of physical and behavioral characteristics are often enough to advance suspicions, but misfortune within the family usually hastens the spirit child diagnosis. When misfortunes strike, particularly when a family already suspects a spirit child, families believe the child is "revealing itself" because it wants to return to the bush and the only way for the child to leave the family and return to the bush is through death.

Any misfortune that strikes the family near the time of the child's birth places the infant at risk. As a young man told me, "When there's a newborn baby and by coincidence there are misfortunes, the traditional man will perceive that the child has brought the misfortunes to the family. That child becomes a spirit child." Sickness and death within the house is the most common misfortune associated with spirit children and misfortunes related to the childbirth itself are common. If the mother falls sick or dies while pregnant, during labor, or soon after the birth of the child, the child may be accused. The death of close and distant relatives around the time of the child's birth also arouses suspicion.

Education and development projects have influenced how some of the younger community members understand the spirit child phenomenon. A group of high school educated men described the spirit child as "just a way of thinking." They expressed the opinion that, "People don't understand the circumstances of nature. That's why they say that a child is a spirit child." Another man suggested that "the spirit child is something people already have in their mind … They conceive an idea about a child that has been born. Maybe there are certain things that are happening in the family when the child was born and they say such a child is a spirit child." Health programs and the increasing availability of education are influencing how some community members understand the spirit child. They may not, however, always suspend their traditional beliefs regarding the spirit child, but rather integrate their new knowledge into notions of the spirit child. The section below, dealing with causation, provides examples.

When defining the spirit child many informants described the distinction between the good spirit child (*sisigo ditigo*, lit. "spirit child eating") and the bad spirit child (*sisigo*). The intention of the good spirit child is to help the family prosper. A family may determine they have a good spirit child when a child presents with all the appearances or behaviors of a bad spirit child but does not die when the concoction is given. A good spirit child may also be determined through divination. Families welcome good spirit children since such a child will succeed in school or work and bring "good things" to the family.

Although families recognize the positive things a good spirit child brings, the good spirit child will not achieve the Nankani notion of full personhood as discussed earlier. Thus, good spirit children are not interred in the family grave but receive the same burial in the bush as bad spirit children. Good and bad spirit children who remain undetected in the family may be discovered through divination following their death, when the family head will consult with a diviner to determine the cause of death. This process reveals the actual identity of the deceased child or elder.

Cause

Although biological understandings of the origins of childhood disabilities are becoming increasingly common, the most commonly identified cause of a spirit child remains the violation or a traditional taboo or boundary. Each of the causes described must occur directly before or while the mother is pregnant. In other words, an infant cannot "catch" a spirit child; it is born a spirit child. As mentioned before, the spirit child is not a case of spirit possession, where the spirit can depart or be exorcised from its host. Accordingly, a spirit child is not the result of the child's actions but of parental transgressions. How then does a family come to have a spirit child? "It's really from god," a woman told me. "But there are also things in human nature that cause it." In this section, I examine those "things in human nature."

Eating: The most common behavior by which a woman can attract a spirit child is if she eats while walking. If a woman should walk anywhere outside the home while eating, pieces of food may fall to the ground. If spirits are nearby, they will follow her and enter her womb. A woman described this danger in this way:

> If you are fond of eating while walking, those spirit children will follow you and pick up the food as you drop it. They will say, 'This woman is good, she likes me. That's why she's dropping all this food.' The spirit will follow the woman all the way to her house. If the ancestors are not strong, the spirit will be able to enter the house and find a way to enter the woman. Before you realize it, you give birth to a spirit child.

Taboos stipulate that a woman must sit down to eat and not remove food from the home. Spirits crave human food and are always looking for opportunities to eat. A woman described the beginning of the wet season as a particularly dangerous time, since spirits come near the houses and farms when the family begins to plant and tend their crops.

Sex: Community members described how male spirits are desirous of women, often following them in attempts to have intercourse with them. A man remarked, "Any time the spirit is just standing there and a woman passes by it can follow her. For the women, maybe she cannot see it, but it sees her. The spirit will follow her and have intercourse with her and she'll not know." Spirits, sex, and sexual taboos are common themes in discussions of spirit child causation.

A woman will catch a spirit child if she has "illegal sex"—that is, intercourse outside the home or in the bush. Illegal sex will attract a spirit child to the woman since spirits use this kind of sex as an opportunity to enter her. A man explained, "If a spirit is passing by while you are having sex, [it can enter you] immediately when you finish, or just before you start, it can move so fast. That is why it's advisable for men not to have intercourse with a woman outside the house." Another man explained that, "Girls these days have sex outside the home instead of going inside a room. They just go anywhere. They have sex outside and around trees, anywhere. The spirit can easily enter a girl and she can give birth to a spirit child."

Several men argued that this taboo must be false. They described how in the past there were more spirit children, but it was also a more traditional time when men and women did not have sex outside their home. "More people these days are having sex outside of their homes," observed one man. An elder confirmed this and added, "But these days, girls are having sex everywhere. They have dances at schools and other places, wherever they go this is where they have intercourse. Then if this [as a cause of spirit children] is true, we would have more spirit children on this earth."

Descriptions of spirit child causation tend to place the majority of the blame on the mother of the child. Men, however, are seen as playing a role in causing spirit child births, the most common circumstance being a man's actions during an adulterous relationship. It is not the adulterous relationship itself, which is accepted as relatively common, but failing to take the necessary precautions around such liaisons. Multiple sources explained that after having sex with someone other than his wife, it is important that a man not rush home immediately. One woman remarked, "Coming home from the outside [after sex] may mean that you are importing the evil spirits into the house." Spirit children are described as being attracted to sex and would use the man's "unclean" condition to follow him and enter the home and possibly his wife. A man is advised to wait for some period of time and to bathe before entering his room.

When a man is concerned that a girlfriend he is sleeping with will have a child that looks like him, he can urinate on an anthill (*guure*) after intercourse, a place of symbolic importance. A woman comments: "That's a very bad thing for men to do. You don't even love the woman and you just go and sleep with her? Then after that you go and urinate on an anthill and cause the woman to give birth to a spirit child." Men explained that they urinate on an anthill after sex because they do not want the child to look like them. It may be that such an act effectively shifts paternity of the potential child from the man to a spirit.

Public Exposure: For women, the location and method used to urinate is a concern. Women are discouraged from relieving themselves in various prohibited places. The most important are the tingane, places where the spirit children are buried, and other spiritually dangerous, liminal, or ambiguous locations. A woman told me, "The place where they abandon the spirit children—there are so many spirit children there—if a woman goes there to urinate, the spirit can easily have intercourse with her." Women are also advised to urinate properly, squatting not standing. Failing to squat or properly conceal yourself while urinating can attract a spirit. A man remarked, "Some women don't want to squat, sometimes they want to stand as men do. So when they do that, the spirit, because they are always roaming about, can easily enter the woman and make her give birth to a spirit child." The theme of male spirit children's desires appears often. "So at the time the woman is urinating like that," a man told me, "The spirit is also having feelings like a normal human being. It can easily have intercourse with her."

Boundary and Taboo Violations: Community members advise women to avoid places where there are forbidden trees, where they bury spirit children, or where spirit children live. A concoction man assured me that most women who have given birth to a spirit child have visited to a taboo place. Women are also not supposed to trespass on a farm or garden plot guarded by a spirit. Such a spirit can be evoked by a woman who has given birth to a spirit child to protect her vegetables with the *sono* or a medicine similar to the dongo. If a woman who has never given birth to a spirit child steals food from a plot protected by the sono, she will give birth to a spirit child.

There are taboos surrounding the killing of certain wild animals, and spirit or totem animals. The intentional death of a totem animal can cause problems for a family, particularly if a woman eats its flesh. A man described spirit animals in this way: "Human beings and animals have a spirit. When you kill a spirit animal, we believe that the spirit in that animal will jump into a human being." This spirit can jump into a woman and result in a spirit child.

When the concoction man performs the rites to send a spirit child to the bush, fertile women must not be present, since the spirit child may enter a womb. A woman who uses unapproved entrances and exits to a house may run the risk of bringing a spirit into the house, since the ancestors are not able to guard those exits. Washing another woman's calabashes at the riverside is also risky and bathing at night is also dangerous. "If you bathe at a late hour, you're likely to get a spirit," as a man explained. Spirits more often roam at night and will undoubtedly be attracted to a woman bathing.

Biology: Biological and biomedical discourse was more often in evidence when I spoke with women and men who had attended school, and women who had participated in maternal health clinics and women's groups. Both men and women identify a variety of biomedical explanations for the arrival of a spirit child, but many of these causes are integrated into and understood within traditional notions of causation. Men and women recognize poverty as a significant factor. A woman remarked, "If you are poor and give birth to a child, you can't go to the hospital. If the child is sick, you can't care for the child, you can't buy drugs, you can't do anything. It's because of all these things that people say it's a spirit child." In addition to poverty, community members identify home birth as a cause. This is likely a result of the health campaigns to encourage women to go a hospital or medical clinic when they are in labor.

Other biomedical causes cited include lack of maternity care, premature birth, drug abuse, severe malaria in pregnant women, prolonged labor, and a heavy workload during pregnancy. Several men and women identified weak or poor quality sperm. A young man explained, "Men who are up to 60 or 70 years and are still having children. At that time, their sperm are weak. They still have intercourse with woman but they give birth to children who are not properly formed." Community members also point to inadequate nutrition as a factor in spirit child births. A woman explained, "In the old days there were not as many nutrients, they were not eating the way we do today. That's why in the old days there were more spirit children. Today we learn what to eat. If you don't get the proper nutrients, you can easily give birth to a spirit child." Finally, the consequences of female genital cutting (FGC) were identified as a factor making childbirth more difficult and resulting in higher maternal mortality and, consequently, a higher incidence of spirit child births.

Other factors: Community members sometimes identify the spirit child as running in families, an essentially genetic explanation: if there has never been a spirit child in the family, there is little likelihood one will appear. The ancestors are rarely implicated in sending a spirit child out of vengeance or frustration. Such a punishment is regarded as too severe to originate with the ancestors. Ultimately, the origin of the spirit child is usually seen as God.

In all this, it must be borne in mind that some clans do not believe in the spirit child at all and regard children with disabilities or abnormal births as acts of God, not the result of malicious spirits.

The Spirit Child as Destroyer

There is broad consensus among the Nankani about what a spirit child does when it enters the family. While the presence of a good spirit child will help the family, the goal of the bad spirit child is to destroy the family. Community members described the spirit child to me on a number of occasions as a "destroyer" that acts out its destructive tendencies by instigating conflict, causing misfortunes or sickness in the house, and killing family members.

Any misfortunes that occur around a child's birth are seen as ominous and an indication that a spirit child was born into the family. Families may blame crop failure or death of livestock on a spirit child. A man explained: "Mishaps in the family will be present, maybe the harvest was poor. They go to the soothsayer and find out that the child who was born two months before is the cause of all the woes in the family. He is a spirit child and will destroy the house, so they will destroy the child." Missing fowls or livestock could be a result of theft by a spirit child who is stealing food for its kin in the bush. Multiple misfortunes or misfortunes that worsen are a concern. Older children may be identified as spirit children when misfortune occurs in conjunction with sickness or the appearance of a developmental delay.

The spirit child will cause sickness in the family and community members told me that the sickness will often kill the same-sex parent first before moving on to the other parent and family members. According to one man, "If the child is a girl, it will kill the mother so it can stay with the father. If it's a male child, it'll kill the father so it can be with the mother and take control of the house."[12] A spirit child may cause the mother and father to fall ill frequently or not allow the mother to recover fully from childbirth. A man explained that, "The child wants to kill the mother, so it's better they kill the child first so the mother can live and give birth again."

A spirit child may also cause fighting, disturbances or "confusion" within the family or between the parents. "The child can let the father beat the mother," one woman explained.

The scholarly literature and the local discourse concerning the spirit child describe the detection and decision-making surrounding spirit child cases as urgent. The spirit child will first eliminate those who are trying to uncover its secret. A concoction man described how the family must take care of the spirit child quickly because it knows that it is "not for the family" and knows that family members are trying to determine if it truly is a spirit child. "Even on the day the child is born," another man told me, "we go to the soothsayer's house and the spirit child already knows what we're doing … It can harm you even that day."

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[12] Note the apparent Oedipus theme. Unfortunately, space and the focus of this dissertation prevent a thorough analysis of it.

In practice, however, I found the urgency depicted in much of the spirit child discourse was not present when the family first suspected a child. There are exceptions, of course, where the death of a spirit child occurs with little or no deliberation, although I never observed or was aware of such a case. These exceptions make wonderful stories, and these are the stories that people propagate. It is more common that a long period of suspicion, repeated visits to the diviner, and numerous help-seeking and decision-making efforts precede a confirmed spirit child diagnosis. A concoction man describes a typical process. "The man will come home and sacrifice a fowl to the ancestors. Then he will be rushing here and there seeking a solution to the problem. Then he will get up again and go to another soothsayer. He may go to a soothsayer three, four, or even six times in a month to make sure it is the child who is causing the problem." Decisions surrounding the death of a child are rarely made overnight.

Detection and Verification

Suspicions and rumor alone do not prove that a child is a spirit child. Evidence must ground suspicions surrounding a child. While the presence of misfortunes, death, strange occurrences, and childhood disability constitute one type of evidence, it does not unequivocally prove the presence of a spirit child. Divination, regarded as the most valid form of evidence of a spirit child's presence, must confirm the diagnosis. However, even the authority of divination and the fact of misfortunes may not be enough to confirm that a child is a spirit child.

As described in the concoction man's quote at the end of the previous section, the divination process surrounding a suspected spirit child can be complex. I was told that at a minimum the family head would consult at least twice, but more often he would visit multiple diviners on multiple occasions to find the truth. In one interview a man explained how the first diviner he consulted confirmed the presence of a spirit child in his house. Days later, he consulted another diviner and discovered the child was not. A third consultation confirmed the second and he no longer had any suspicions.

Multiple consultations are not only necessary to affirm suspicions, but also to make sure that the spirit child itself is not influencing the answers. A spirit child can interfere with or "cover" the divination in its attempt to remain undetected in the family. If the divination is inconsistent or if the client receives mixed messages, he may find a person that the spirit child is unaware of to divine for him. A man explained:

> A spirit child can prevent you from finding it. You can go and divine the first time and it will say it is a spirit child. You go a second time and it will say that it is not. So we normally get a relative, someone close to us, and give him two sticks. One is good and one is bad. We don't tell him which are which. He will go soothsay and [the ancestors] will choose one. He will bring the sticks back and say which one was chosen, either the stick indicating it is a spirit child or the one that does not. The next day you do it again and give the sticks to three other people. If they all come back with the stick saying it is a spirit child then you know. You follow this [procedure] because the spirit child will not be able to prevent that disclosure.

From the local perspective, divination provides an objective measure, a way to access the obscured or hidden and validate spirit child suspicions.

Outside observers frequently misconstrue this diagnostic process, believing that diviners "tell" their clients that they have a spirit child or that the spirit child diagnosis is determined by the diviner. This is incorrect. As I make previously clarified, the diviner plays no role in generating or confirming suspicions of any sort.

When a man is consulting a diviner about a spirit child, there is no one divinatory object, or yale signifying a spirit child, since it is a combination of various items that indicate a spirit child is inhabiting a house. I describe one such divinatory combination that is indicative of a spirit child.

During the consultation, the bakoldoore points to the seedpod from the *kairga* tree. The pod is sealed and it is difficult to open and extract the nut, suggesting that there is something hiding and growing inside the house. Next, the bakoldoore indicates the *yooka*, a fruit used for small calabashes. This means that the thing is hiding inside a woman or is with a woman. Then it will point to an item that symbolizes the *loco*, a quiver for arrows that is significant in the Nankani funeral ceremony. The loco indicates that whatever is hiding in or with the woman wants to die or is already dead. The man then asks the ancestor if the thing "wearing the loco" is for the bush or for the house. It will answer through divination saying that it is for the bush. The man then asks if the thing is going to kill or stay in the house and be peaceful, and the bakoldoore indicates a stone of multiple colors. This means that the man will be unable to determine its true identity and that it is attempting to fool you by changing its identity or intentions. The bakoldoore may indicate a red cloth, indicating something is hot and wants to kill people in the house. If it indicates other colors, that means the spirit child has not decided if it wants to kill. A black stone means death.

In addition to divination, families may seek additional verification. The soles of the suspected child's feet are covered in oil at night to see if it gets up to walk while everyone is sleeping. A man described this process: "You can't just determine that a person is a spirit child by physical appearance. If a family gives birth to a child, they will put some oil on the feet. In the morning, if they find dirt on the feet, it means the child has gone out walking. The child cannot walk. Where did he go?" Families will also place ash or sand at the entrance to the room where the child is sleeping to see if the child is visiting the bush at night. In the morning they look for footprints or ash on the child's feet. Sesame seeds (*sere*) are also used to detect spirit children because spirit children are believed to love sesame seeds. At night, families will spread the sere around the entrance to the room. If it is gone by morning, a spirit child has awakened in the night and eaten it. A woman described the procedure this way: "When we suspect a spirit child, we leave the seeds on the ground. They're so small, adults sometimes cannot even pick them up. Since only a spirit child can pick them up, and if by the following morning the seeds are not there, you know it's a spirit child." Families also monitor the child's feces. "At night a spirit child is able to eat the leftover food. The following morning the child's feces will look just like adult feces. What kind of child is that? A child who can only suck the breast has gone out to take solid food."

The extensive confirmation process indicates that decisions surrounding a spirit child are not made quickly and that several steps are necessary to properly confirm a case. Not all children pass through every one of the steps just described, but most families will at a minimum have two or more strong suspicions—for instance, a physical disability and a misfortune in the house—and will also consult a diviner many times. Families may also use the oil, ash, and seeds. My experience indicates that not all children initially suspected of being a spirit child are confirmed. I encountered two cases where a child was suspected, but the decision-making or verification process failed to indicate that they were spirit children. "We determined that she is just disabled," said one grandfather.

After collecting the necessary evidence and confirming that a child is indeed a spirit child, the family must conduct one final test: the dongo. A woman told me that, despite all the other tests, "It's only the dongo that has the power to determine if a spirit child is a spirit child or not."

Treatment

Occasionally a family is able to appeal to the ancestors to take the spirit child away or cause its death, but often the ancestors are not powerful enough to bring the death about. After a period of help-seeking and after the family has verified their suspicions, a concoction man is sought to treat the spirit child with the dongo. A woman remarked, "When we give birth to such children, we will always try to find treatments for them. We will go to many herbalists. When we fail, we will go to the soothsayer's house and find out if such a child is a spirit child. Then the concoction man is summoned."

The treatments and methods used by concoction men vary. As described earlier, the most common is the black medicine from the dongo and an herbal infusion consisting of a plant referred to locally as bunbunlia. Twenty percent of the concoction men I interviewed did not give anything to the child to ingest and would simply touch the dongo to the child, or hang it above the child's head. Other concoction men mixed a small amount of the black medicine with water but administered it to the child in such a small amount, I could not be sure that the child ingested enough "poison" to cause its death.

The medicine the concoction men used appeared largely symbolic. The actual amount or type of medicine ingested, if any at all, was not a significant concern to them. They felt that the power invested in the dongo was what sends the spirit child to the bush. Community members and the concoction men could cite numerous examples to support the idea that the administration of the concoction was often unnecessary. For example, concoction men described situations where the mere presence of the dongo would cause the death of a spirit child.

When the family decides to call for a concoction man, he typically brings the dongo and mixes the concoction for the family. He arrives early in the morning and administers the concoction himself or gives it to an older woman who is no longer fertile. After the concoction is given the dongo is placed on or near the head of the child. The child's death confirms to the family that it was indeed a spirit child. If the child lives, it is, in theory, not a spirit child. In practice, however, I found that many families would make repeated attempts to send a child away, claiming that the child refused to go because it was too strong or the proper sacrifices necessary to convince the child to leave this world were not performed.

I describe the common elements involved in treating a spirit child. Based upon interviews and participant observation in two spirit child ritual reenactments with concoction men Akaare and Ayisoba, I also describe two ceremonies surrounding the spirit child. The descriptions I provide are not representative of all the concoction men's practices, though concoction men do share many of the same basic symbolic elements within the ritual. The rituals I describe consist of two parts: the treatment of the child followed by the ceremony to send the spirit to the bush.

Akaare's Ceremony

Upon being summoned by a family to treat a spirit child, Akaare goes to their house and boils the roots of the bunbunlia. Akaare also uses the stems of the *yegipia*. Both the mother and the father remain at the house during the preparation and the ceremony, although other concoction men usually require that all women in the house leave due to the spiritual danger. After boiling the herbs, Akaare adds to the resulting tea a small amount—one teaspoon—of black medicine from inside the dongo.

Akaare asks the father if he should give the concoction. If the father agrees Akaare holds the child and gives it the concoction. He remarks that just a small amount is needed to kill the child, less than 100-150 ml. After giving the concoction the child is touched twice with the dongo and placed in a room within the compound. Death usually happens quickly. The concoction men suggest a spirit child typically dies within four hours. Akaare returns home after giving the concoction and the family calls him to come and bury the spirit child after it has passed.

Before burying the child, he wraps it within an old sleeping mat. The father goes with him to bury the child on the hill. The mother remains behind wearing the dongo for protection in case the spirit runs back to the house and tries to enter her again. Akaare takes calabash filled with sesame and sorghum seeds and a hoe. He places the spirit child under his arm and quickly and silently walks to the hill where the spirit children are buried. He uses the hoe to dig a shallow grave, less than a foot deep, places the spirit child within the grave, and quickly covers it with dirt and stones. Akaare works quickly, lest the spirit child rise up and attack him or return to the house before he is able to conduct the ceremony to send the spirit away. Before leaving the grave, he scatters the seeds to distract the spirit if it comes out, as it cannot resist eating them. While quickly walking home, he tosses handfuls over his shoulder to delay the spirit if it attempts to follow him.

Upon arriving back at the house Akaare begins the ceremony to send the spirit away. He boils roots from selected trees along the riverside mixed with some of the bunbunlia and the yegipia. The father and mother of the child use this mixture as a purifying bath. He covers the earthen pot containing the herbs with half of a large broken pot. Akaare places the head of a hoe, symbolic of fertility, directly on the pot and sets the dongo on the hoe. Two sacrifices occur. First, a guinea fowl and a chicken are immediately sacrificed to the dongo to urge it to send the spirit away. On the following day, a goat is sacrificed along with three chickens if the spirit child was a girl, and four chickens if a boy. These are symbolic numbers associated with gender. The second sacrifice is a payment to the dongo for its services.

During the first sacrifice to the dongo it is given instructions to capture the spirit and send it away. The fowls' throats are slit as they are held directly above the dongo. As the blood falls upon the dongo, the concoction man covers the outside of the dongo with feathers plucked from the fowl. The concoction man says:

> Now dongo, go and hunt for the spirit child. After collecting these things, you should not sleep or sit down, but go out as a dog, go out with the ancestors, and get the spirit child, so I can feed you. As the day comes to an end, you should go out and hunt for more. Collect, collect, collect this

> fowl and be awake. Today it isn't free, today it isn't free, you have to go out and work. Collect these things. We are here to help each other.

After the sacrifice to the dongo, the mother and father consume a small sip of the specially prepared bathwater and bathe. The concoction man takes the roots used in the bath and buries them. The meat from the sacrifices is boiled and only the concoction man or those who have had a spirit child can eat. Family members prepare additional food and pito to feed to the dongo. When the food is ready, the concoction man asks everyone's permission to sacrifice again. Squatting down, he takes the dongo and says, "Dongo, get up wash your hands. That is your t.z., meat, and pito. Get up and wash your hands and collect these things. As day breaks, don't sleep, you should get up and hunt, as people have spirit children. Come and collect these things." The concoction man stands and faces each cardinal direction holding a calabash filled with pito. He dips his hand into the pito and flings his hand in the air sprinkling pito to all the directions and declaring to his ancestors that they should also take part in the meal.

Ayisoba's Ceremony

When a family notifies Ayisoba that they need the dongo, he consults a diviner to determine if they indeed have a spirit child and if he should proceed to treat it. Before leaving his house, Ayisoba offers a libation to his ancestors at the shrines near the entrance to his house, asking for their protection when facing the spirit child. Wearing the dongo, Ayisoba enters the family's house. He inspects and observes the child's behavior, looking for signs that it is a spirit child. Previous divination consultations performed by the head of the family or Ayisoba determined what the spirit child has requested before returning to the bush. Those sacrifices are usually done before the concoction is given.

When preparing the concoction, Ayisoba does not boil or use any herbs other than what is already within the black medicine. He takes a small calabash of water and mixes in a teaspoon of black medicine from the mouth of the dongo. The black medicine does not dissolve in the water. All the women who are still able to become pregnant are sent away from the house. He (or an older woman) sits down and takes the child in his lap, head facing away, and pours the concoction into the child's mouth. The amount of water the child is able to swallow is negligible and the child often spits a great deal of it out. Ayisoba explained that the actual amount of water used is not critical, just the fact that some is swallowed. A different concoction man remarked during an interview that even if the child spits out the concoction, if it is a spirit child, it will still die.

Someone places the child in the room alone with the dongo around its neck. Ayisoba describes death occurring quickly. Since the ritual occurs early in the morning, most children do not survive to mid-day. While the family is waiting for the child to pass, the mother is allowed to return home and care for the child. Sometimes it can take up to two days for the child to die. After the child dies the ritual is performed.

Ayisoba sacrifices a black fowl to the ancestral shrines located outside of the house. During this sacrifice, the ancestors are told of what is occurring and their guidance and protection are sought. Next, a guinea fowl is sacrificed to the female ancestor at a shrine inside the compound. Ayisoba declares, "Grandmother, you should collect this fowl through the gods of the land, so that they are able to communicate with the ancestors and make sure that what I'm using is used well and will catch more spirit children."

The dongo is placed on a hoe resting upon a large overturned pot—symbolic of women and fertility—in an open area in the middle of the compound. Sorghum flour and water are mixed in a calabash and offered to the dongo. This is followed by a sacrifice consisting of a white and red fowl. While bleeding the white fowl upon the dongo, Ayisoba says, "Dongo, this fowl is so you are able to work. Wherever you are going you shouldn't fear anything. You should be able to bring prosperity and protection to the family, and let them always go out and speak the truth." After the fowl stops bleeding feathers are placed on the dongo and the fowl is thrown to the ground. All watch to see how the fowl lands. Upon striking the ground, it flops around a few times and comes to rest upon its back. If the fowl dies face up, it signifies that the person sacrificing is clean and has no bad intentions. In other sacrificial contexts, it signifies that the ancestors have accepted the sacrifice. The same procedure is repeated for the second fowl. He also sacrifices a goat. Finally, Ayisoba pours pito onto the dongo while saying, "This one is the pito. You should work with the gods of the land [tingane], you should go into the land and get all the bad spirits out of the land. Drive away all the bad spirits out so that we will be prosperous and peace will be upon the land."

The fowls are cleaned and all the feathers are placed in a large basket. The parents of the spirit child shave their heads and a woman elder takes their clothing and places it in the basket with the feathers. The concoction man and a helper take the basket and the deceased spirit child to the bush where spirit children are buried (if the ritual is held immediately after the death). The old clothing and feathers are scattered near the burial site. Upon returning, only those that have had a spirit child can take part in the meal. The second half of the ceremony can take place several days or weeks later, as families often need time to accumulate the necessary sacrificial animals. Ayisoba rewards the dongo with a sacrifice of three fowls if the spirit child was a boy, or four fowls if a girl.

I asked community members and the concoction men if they ever returned to the grave of a spirit child after its burial. Many people stated that they had out of curiosity a day or two after a burial. All remarked that the spirit child had disappeared. When I asked why it disappeared, community members explained that the spirit child rose up and returned to the bush with the other spirit children.

The following is a narration of another concoction man, describing how he treats spirit children.

> When the family comes to report that they have a spirit child in the house we ask what the child is doing. 'Have you actually tested the child to know that it's a spirit child?' If they say yes, we give the dongo to the man who has come to report the child. The man, as he has collected the dongo, is not supposed to talk to anyone while returning home. When he gets to the house he has to hide the dongo somewhere, because if the spirit child sees it, it can run off with it and you will never see it again. When they are ready they give the dongo to an old woman who will put the black medicine inside a pot for the child to drink. They smear some of the medicine on the chest and forehead of the child and place the dongo around its neck. If it is a spirit child, it will die. If it is not, it will not die. When the spirit child dies they return to report it to me and I perform the ceremony to send the spirit away.

Some concoction men do not use any medicine at all, as the dongo alone is strong enough to send the spirit child back to the bush. Another concoction man describes his ritual.

> I do not give the water to the child. If you give birth to a spirit child, I will take the dongo to the house where the child is. I place some medicine on the ground where the child is sleeping, just beneath the child under its mat. I place the dongo on its chest. By the next day, if the child has not died, it is not a spirit child.

Other narratives, such as those recounted in this chapter, describe the dongo alone as able to kill the child. Asorigiya claimed that the death of spirit children often does not require the concoction. "The concoction man only needs to come and stand at the entrance with the dongo. That alone, the concoction man standing there, will make the child inside the room start crying and it will die." A woman remarked that if a child was really a spirit child, it would simply disappear from the house when the concoction man arrived. But however the child dies, either by concoction or natural causes, a ceremony is performed to send the spirit away and reward the dongo. If the sacrifices and ritual are not performed, the child will come back to cause misfortunes in the house, or return as the next child born to the mother. Ayisoba explained:

> You can't owe the spirit child a single thing. You always have to provide whatever it has asked for so it will go away. Maybe you have a spirit child and you are poor and do not have the necessary things to give the spirit. Unless you are able to perform the ceremony to send the spirit away, if you are unable to do that, it will always come back to the family. Within a year the spirit can come back to the house. If they cannot satisfy the spirit, a woman can get some medicine from the concoction man to wear around her neck. When the spirit comes, it will not be able to identify the woman or enter her again.

I encountered two family traditions in which the concoction is given to every child born into the house, thus ensuring that no spirit children would gain entry to the house. The concoction man who practiced this told me that many of his children died because they were spirit children.

Treating a spirit child is expensive. The ceremony requires a significant number of sacrifices. If the spirit child is a girl it will cost a family several gallons of pito, a hoe, seven chickens, one guinea fowl, a goat, and some other local foods. If the rituals are conducted during the dry season when prices are higher, the total cost can exceed $60. Most families cannot bear this expense. The cost of the spirit child diagnosis and ceremony emphasizes the seriousness of the spirit child cases.

I asked Ayisoba if he could describe the most powerful spirit child he has treated. This was his response:

> The most powerful one I encountered was in Burkina Faso. I came and discovered that the child wanted so many things, even Burkina Faso pito. We managed to get all those things for the child, but when I treated it with the dongo it refused to go. So I left the dongo there and returned home. The following morning the family came to get me on a motorbike to bring me back to their house. Where they left the child, it was not there. The child vanished! The dongo was gone as well. This child can't walk, how did it go out? It was very powerful. I consulted a soothsayer to determine where the child was and found out that it was on the hill. I went searching on the hill and saw the child between two rocks lying there. I asked it, "Even through I have not killed you with the dongo, you have just come to bury yourself here? You must go back to the house and pass the rite before you can come here." I went to hold the child and it tried to bite me, so I had to carry it by its legs [like a goat] back to the house to treat it.

Ayisoba also described another case where he was scared the child was going to kill him.

> After I had treated one child, I gathered an old mat and put the dongo against the child. I exited the room but something told me to take the dongo with me. So I went back in to get the dongo and saw a snake sleeping with the child. When I tried to take the dongo the snake tried to bite me so I ran out. The child wanted to fight me! I found a stick and went back into the room but did not see the snake. It was hiding. It wasn't until I determined that the treatment had worked on the child, it was dead, that I was able to see the snake again. It was in the corner, so I used the stick to kill it. I went outside to the child's father and said, "Look at how your child behaves," and I showed them the snake. So we knew that the child was actually a spirit child. That's why we sometimes call them snakes.

Concoctionless Death and the Post-Mortem Diagnosis

Previous scholarly understandings and depictions of the spirit child did not consider the fact that many spirit child diagnoses are post-mortem. That is, a child passes away from another condition such as malaria and the family attributes the cause of its death to its being a spirit child. I was aware of several families who suspected their child was a spirit child although it appeared to have died naturally. Other families called for a concoction man only to have the child die before his arrival. Although the dongo did not kill the child, the family still considered the child to be a spirit child. In some respects, this illustrates how the spirit child diagnosis is used as an explanatory model to better understand the reasons surrounding a child's death. The use of the spirit child as an explanatory model often surfaced in my discussions with families and other community members.

The spirit child deaths due to natural causes and the post-mortem spirit child diagnoses pose an interesting problem for the Navrongo Health Research Centre's verbal post mortem (VPM) surveys for its demographic surveillance system. It is highly unlikely that all the children coded as spirit children—a coding that indicates infanticide in the VPM classificatory system—were in fact infanticide deaths. When families talk about why their child died with the VPM fieldworker they often do not volunteer information about *how* it died. They may simply report that "It was a spirit child," or that "It was not meant for this world." When fieldworkers and outside researchers hear such statements, they often assume that the cause of death was infanticide rather than some other source such as an infection. They may not consider that the spirit child is being used as a way to explain and understand why the child died.

Shortly after arriving in Ghana, I found that families were calling concoction men to perform post-mortem spirit child rituals. For example, upon consulting a diviner they might determine a child who had died months or years previous was really a hidden spirit child and responsible for current disturbances. The family would summon the concoction man to exhume the child's remains and rebury them in the bush. After the reburial, the concoction man would conduct the necessary rituals, as described earlier, to send the spirit away. For several concoction men, these post-mortem rituals made up the majority of the spirit child ceremonies they performed, often up to twelve per year compared to the one to three per year average for children needing the dongo or concoction. Ayisoba describes a post-mortem case. "A child went to the hospital in Bolgatanga and died. The NGO buried the child there. Months later, the spirit of the child was still coming back to the family and disturbing them. It was necessary for us to perform the rites to send its spirit away."

Final Thoughts

Having reviewed the Nankani discourse on spirit children, the characteristics of the spirit child, and the sociocultural world the spirit child inhabits, we can begin to grasp how the Nankani spirit child is understood and experienced from their perspective. The accounts presented in this chapter and the descriptions of the events surrounding the spirit child emphasize important questions concerning the phenomenon. How do spirit children die? If no concoction is given, is the spirit child phenomenon really infanticide? Is this problem as serious as stakeholders think? What are the sentiments surrounding the spirit child within families? In the following chapter, I present four in-depth accounts of four spirit children and their families with whom I worked closely. The remaining chapters bring these accounts together and respond to these questions.

CHAPTER 7

Case Studies on the Spirit Child

Introduction

My account in the previous chapter of the myths, misconceptions, and discourse concerning the spirit child may seem to have further obscured the subject of the spirit child. It was in fact my intent to emphasize the multivocality, broader context, and range of local understanding of this phenomenon. This chapter, however, will undertake a descriptive and discursive examination in order to build an understanding of what actually happens in practice.

Four selected case studies will depict the spirit child within the context of the family's experience. Such a case study approach, from both methodological and representational perspectives, is an effective way to facilitate an integrative understanding of human experience. It minimizes the fragmentation of narrative and experience into decontextualized pieces scattered through various chapters. Although in other chapters I draw upon narrative fragments—or ethnobytes—as part of my interpretative process, a properly grounded analysis requires that we start from and retain a cohesive narrative. Moreover, the material in these cases may allow the reader to develop alternative understandings of the spirit child phenomena that go beyond those presented here. I provide some interpretation within these case studies to contextualize what is occurring, and, I argue, the representation of each of these cases is an interpretive act in itself. The full analysis and interpretation occurs within the following chapters.

During his fieldwork and analysis, Janzen (1978), inspired by Turner's case studies in *Drums of Affliction* (1968), found that working from a case study approach was more effective and appropriate in the local context, clearly surpassing the componential analyses he initially intended to use. The case study approach, along with a more person-centered methodology, permitted Janzen to understand the complex connections between multiepisodic medical cases, the available therapeutic options, and the larger context (1978:34). Gottlieb also noted that the use of case histories gives "voice to individual agency in the construction of experience as it relates to structural expectations" (1992:48).

The following case studies provide illustrations of help-seeking, decision-making, family dynamics, power relationships, rumor, interpersonal struggles, and the local understandings and meanings associated with the spirit child. Each case is based on several months to one year of on-going visits with families, semi-formal and informal interviews, visits to the hospital or medical clinic, information from medical records (when available), and participant observation.

Samuel

Only a few weeks after arriving in Ghana, Joe and Elijah took me to visit Samuel, a spirit child that AfriKids had been supporting for more than a year. Samuel came to AfriKids's attention through a concoction man who was collaborating with AfriKids to help identify at-risk spirit children. Samuel's father, Apoore, after consulting a diviner and confirming that his son was a spirit child, visited the concoction man and requested that he come and prepare the herbs and conduct the ceremony. AfriKids approached the family to see if they could help.

I had little idea what to expect when we visited Samuel's house only a few weeks after I arrived in Ghana. Up to this point, I had read and heard a great deal about spirit children, believing I had a basic understanding of the practice, but this was my first "real" case. After a long drive into a remote section near the Burkina Faso border, I followed Joe along a path that snaked its way through the millet that towered above our heads until it ended in a small clearing in front of Samuel's family compound.

We greeted the family members and sat down on the logs serving as a bench beneath the baobab. A small child ran into the fields to find Samuel's father and the mother was called from inside the compound. Although it was difficult to judge their economic status, this larger family unit appeared to be better off than many I had seen. There were several goats and fowls milling around the compound, all the rooms had sheet-metal roofing and the elder brother, who worked in a government position in a nearby city, was building a modern house next door. However, despite the general appearance of wealth, there were significant income differences within the family. The older brother appeared to have supported his extended family and particularly Samuel's biomedical and traditional treatments. However, when during the previous year the family saw no improvement in Samuel's condition, the brother decided he could no longer afford or justify the expensive treatments and withdrew his support. Soon after, the family sought the concoction man and AfriKids stepped in. There was some discussion that the brother supported the possibility that Samuel was a spirit child.

Samuel's mother, Awoko, emerged from the compound with him hoisted onto her side, and Apoore soon came in from his work in the fields. Other than an old shirt, Samuel was wearing nothing. Although this makes toileting easier to manage and is not particularly unusual for an infant, at 27 months of age, Samuel should have been wearing pants and been under the supervision of the children that had gathered around to watch us. Within a few moments, it became apparent to me that Samuel had poor motor control and muscle tone: he could not hold his head upright, his body was stiff, he was drooling, and he could not coordinate his movements.

I asked Awoko when she noticed something was different about Samuel. She explained, while handing me his Ministry of Health medical record containing his birth, developmental, and medical history, that right after his birth he started to exhibit "stiffness" in his body that spread out among all his limbs. I examined his medical record. It indicated that he was consistently below the WHO weight recommendations. Six months before my visit, he weighed 7.3kg (16 lbs) and judging from his current appearance he had gained little in the interim.

I learned from the medical record how in his first six months of life Samuel made five trips to the community health clinic. On October 27, Awoko reported a fever and Samuel was diagnosed with malaria. Two weeks later, the card indicated his mother brought him to the clinic because he cried when urinating and defecating. No diagnosis was recorded. On December 1st, Awoko reported a fever and crying again, on the 12th a fever, vomiting and cough. On the 25th, he was diagnosed with malaria. Ten months passed before the next entry in his record indicating a diagnosis of cerebral infant paralysis (cerebral palsy). It was difficult to determine if the cerebral palsy was a result of brain damage resulting from the fevers, a difficult birth, or a prenatal issue. The last entry on his medical card recommended that he receive a pediatric and neurological consultation. Such a specialist consultation was out of the question.

Awoko looked healthy and was in relatively good spirits. She has been caring for Samuel fulltime since his birth and was unable to do much work around the home or farm, a serious concern for her and other family members. AfriKids gave Awoko a loan to start a small trading business, but when she would arrive at the market, Samuel would begin to cry and require constant attention. People would make comments about him as she tended to his needs. No doubt the rumors and speculation were a concern.

"How old are you?" I asked the mother.

She laughed, thought a moment and said, "I'm not sure."

Joe explained how most people do not keep track of their age in numbers; rather, they say they were born around a particular event, for example, when Nkrumah took office. "If you want to calculate the years of a mother," he said, "you look at the eldest child here." He glanced over to her daughter sitting nearby. "She is 12 years, so you just add 18 or 19 years and you'll get her age." Later, we discovered that her 12-year-old daughter, who we thought was her eldest, was actually her second child. Awoko's first child had died, her daughter was her second birth and Samuel was the third. We estimated that Awoko was around 33 years old.

We continued to talk about Samuel's condition, and when she began to notice problems. She described how, when she was four months pregnant, she noticed something was different. She tired easily, frequently having to stop and rest while walking or working.

"Was the birth itself unusual?" I asked.

"The labor started in the night. There were some pains, but it was not time for him to come yet. I thought it must be a sickness or something. I could not urinate, and it was very painful. So I waited until the next morning and we went to the Bongo hospital. When I got there, they said it was labor. I had to wait awhile, and they said they have to do an operation. They did the operation and I had the child. They kept us in the hospital for a good nine days."

Four days after returning home, the mother heard Samuel cry out in the middle of the night and discovered that he was experiencing *tizi*, a mental abnormality and a form of seizures or convulsions (*nenga*) brought about by tree spirits.

Samuel's medical card did not contain any information concerning the seizures. Later in my fieldwork, I found that mothers, upon taking their children to health clinics or the hospital, would not report seizures, but chose instead to focus on the temperature of the child's body, the frequency and characteristics of its bowel movements, and excessive crying. In the earlier case of Leah, we observed that her mother also did not disclose the daily seizures Leah was having. It is difficult to know exactly why this should have been the case, and if it is indeed widespread throughout the area. One explanation is that local understandings of seizures conceive of it as being spiritual in origin, the domain of a traditional healer, and something that biomedical practitioners are ill equipped to treat properly. Residents may also feel the need to conceal what biomedicine perceives are "irrational" beliefs. Even mentioning that your child may be having seizures signifies the supernatural, as "*ti-*," the root of tizi, the Nankani word for mental abnormality, is tree (*tia*), suggesting to healthcare providers a non-biological explanatory system. Frequently, spiritual understandings of causation are not tolerated during clinical encounters in hospitals, and patients can be lectured for bringing up such "superstitions."

Over the next year, Samuel's family visited many traditional healers, medical doctors, and herbalists without success. They took him to a sorcerer who attempted to "see" the true cause of the problems, sacrificed a fowl, placed a small incision in Samuel's forehead, and applied a mixture of herbs. Unfortunately, this treatment and others were unsuccessful.

Samuel was close to a year in age when the family considered that he might indeed be a spirit child, a possibility that had first arisen eight months previous. When he was four-months old, the family had consulted a diviner when the child had stopped breastfeeding, a sign that he might be getting food from somewhere else, possibility the bush, and so might be a spirit child. The family did not agree with this diagnosis and continued to search for treatment; nonetheless, the possibility lingered in the back of their minds.

I asked Apoore, "What makes you think he might be a spirit child?"

"To be a spirit child," Apoore explained, "there must be other things that determine it, not just sickness. With Samuel, it is only sickness. He doesn't do any other abnormal things in the house. But when we had done all the treatments and there was no improvement, the only thing that we could do was go to the soothsayer and find out. It is only though divination that you determine it is a spirit child.

"Where does the spirit child come from?" I asked

The family members and on-lookers laughed. Apoore explained the origins of the spirit child and Samuel's condition. "Normally, it's from the ancestors. It passes generation to generation. If a family has it from the beginning, then it will come back again. But in our family, we have no history of a spirit child in our house. In Samuel's case, when his mother was pregnant, she would go to the Bongo clinic for prenatal care. Once, as she was walking there, she stopped to rest beneath a baobab tree and picked a baobab fruit to eat. She didn't know it, but that place is where they usually bury spirit children when they die. That is what happened, they gave her a spirit child."

Awoko agreed that this was probably the best explanation.

The family remained hopeful that maybe one day Samuel would be able to sit on his own or even walk. They continued to seek out treatments, some in neighboring Burkina Faso. Both AfriKids and the family were hoping for a miracle cure but as time went on this seemed increasingly unlikely. AfriKids looked into finding a residential home for him, but the few homes in the country were filled and had long waiting lists. But when AfriKids presented the family with the hypothetical options of sending Samuel away or finding a way to support him at home, they chose the latter. It was clear that they would miss him if he left. Despite Samuel's disabilities and his ambiguous status as a spirit child, the family did not want to see him go to another city. Nor did they want to facilitate his death. What they were searching for was a sense of normalcy for the family.

Apoore remained committed to doing nothing that would facilitate his son's death, but emphasized the difficultly of caring for such a child.

"You know," he said, referring to Awoko, "it's hard, what she is doing. It's very painful to take care of the child."

He and the other family members knew that Samuel's death would be a difficult but likely eventuality. They hoped that something—a treatment or natural intervention—would "set him free."

"I say not to kill the child," Apoore told me, "but wait until a time comes for him to pass away."

Awoko still cares for Samuel on a full time basis. The family wants to have another child but recognize that it will be difficult. Currently, Edward, a childhood disability specialist from a nearby town, visits with Samuel and his family a few times a month, teaching them ways to care for him and improve his muscle tone. Although his services are costly and infrequent, Edward's work is helping the family better understand Samuel's condition and how to integrate him into their daily activities.

Samuel is recurrently ill, more so than other children his age, and his weight is dangerously low. I asked a physician about the prognosis in Samuel's case. He was not optimistic. He remarked that, although it's admirable that the family had been able to do such a good job of caring for the child, it was likely that Samuel was one infection away from death.

Samuel's case, like the other spirit child discussed in this text, is a frequent topic of conversation at AfriKids. Program managers regularly emphasize that although the NGO could temporarily help families, disability issues are a social concern and it is the government's responsibility to facilitate options for children like Samuel. This is unlikely to occur at higher bureaucratic levels, since there are persistent funding problems concerning disability rights and education programs in Ghana and programs for disabled children are simply not a priority. If change is to occur, it will come from the grass-roots level. Edward, who works with several other children monitored by AfriKids, also opened a day school for disabled children in Navrongo. Such efforts at a local level offer some hope that they can produce lasting benefit for families throughout northern Ghana.

Azuma

Azuma, a three-year old girl, lived with her family in the remote area. Ayisoba, the concoction man discussed in the previous chapter, lived nearby and it was Ayisoba who informed AfriKids about Azuma and told us that Azuma's mother suspected her of being a spirit child, even looking to test her with a concoction. The first time I met the family was when Joe was bringing the community health nurse, to assess the health of Azuma and Abiiro, her mother.

During my first visit with the family, I was shocked by the poverty and the general conditions. There were eight or more disheveled children of various ages sitting or lying in the shade of baobab tree with Apaanzo, the eldest man in the family. All the children under the age of eight had kwashiorkor malnutrition, with distended bellies and irregular hair color and growth. Everyone had upper respiratory infections with persistent coughs and the children seemed to lack the energy to move. One of the rooms within the family compound was caving in, and the place in general was in poor condition.

The mother, Abiiro, slowly came out of the compound, limping from a significant filariasis infection and carrying Azuma. She sat down on a bench across from us. Azuma sat on her lap with a pained and concerned look on her face, her mouth persistently half-open, teeth bared as she scrunched her upper lip in such a way that it cracked the dried snot crusted on it. She was extremely malnourished and obviously sick. After exchanging customary greetings and explaining why we had come, we talked about Azuma with Abiiro, who also looked exhausted, weak, and malnourished.

Azuma's medical card indicated that she was consistently underweight during her three years of life, never exceeding 5 kg. (11 lbs.). Other than her frailty, her most noticeable feature was her right eye, which frequently wandered inward as the other eye stared straight ahead. This "look" troubled family members. Conversations with other community members revealed that wandering eyes are seen as a sign that a person is "up to something"—that is, witchcraft or sorcery. The nurse tried to get Azuma to stand, but the child could only do this with support. Her legs were extraordinary skinny and bowed outward and she lacked the necessary muscle tone to stand on her own or take a step forward. She cried frequently and refused to leave her mother's arms. The nurse, without physically examining Azuma, quickly pronounced that the child was fine, and that she simply needed some proper nutrition.

"That wandering eye is caused by the child failing to get the proper eye drops during birth," the nurse explained. "The mother had gonorrhea. If she would have gone to the clinic to deliver, none of this would have happened."

As we spoke, Azuma made repeated attempts to breastfeed, primarily for comfort since Abiiro had stopped producing milk some time before. Abiiro was 34 years-old, although she appeared much older. She had three other children, the eldest a boy of 14. Azuma's father, Azaare, was not home. As we were to discover over the next seven months, this was a regular occurrence. When we asked about where he was, Azaare's older brother, Apaanzo, the head of the household, flippantly informed us that his younger brother was an important man, with important things to do.

In her exhaustion, Abiiro expressed ambivalence about the spirit child diagnosis. If Azuma had a medical problem, she remarked, it was just a medical problem. She said that if the family was healthy and Azuma was developing properly, she herself would have little reason to believe that her daughter was a spirit child. However, Azuma's condition and behavior were making her suspicious and she was concerned that Azuma might be causing her illness, or even trying to kill her.

We discussed Azuma's birth. Abiiro reported that a midwife was unable to help with the delivery, as she went into labor at midnight and they were too far from the midwife's home to fetch her. People rarely travel along the trails or roads at night because there is no lighting and because significant spiritual danger emerges at that time. Although the midwives frequently emphasize that families should not hesitate to contact them at night, I encountered other situations where families would not send for a midwife. They wanted to respect the midwife's working hours, they told me.

Towards the end of our first visit, the nurse gave the mother a lecture on family planning and the importance of antenatal care, despite the fact that Azuma had all her vaccinations and checkups. There *was* the strong possibility that that the mother and father were interested in having another child and this desire for another child may have been fueling the spirit child suspicions.

We told the family that we would come the following week with food and medicine, and that they should have the pots and other kitchen utensils ready for our arrival. The nurse indicated how she wanted to show the family additional ways of making nutritious meals with locally available ingredients, and provide multivitamins and medicine for Azuma, as she was warm and likely had an active malarial infection. The family did not disagree. They subsisted on only one substantial carbohydrate-dominated meal in the evening and snacked on groundnuts throughout the day.

The nurse explained that vitamin supplements would stimulate the child's appetite, though I doubted that Azuma needed an appetite stimulant and more hunger pains, particularly when there was already too little food in the household. Surely any money spent on vitamins would be better spent on nutritious food.

The following week, when we returned to the house, it was clear that the family was unprepared for our arrival. They scrambled to move their "kitchen" outside beneath the baobab tree. The AfriKids staff and nurse were annoyed and told me that the adults did not care about what was happening, or even about the health of the children. When confronted about their lack of preparation, Apaanzo explained that he had gone earlier in the morning to divine and discovered that the ancestors not only did not want him to repair a room in his house that day, but had instructed him that he should not prepare for our arrival. It seemed obvious to us that he was using ancestral authority to displace blame. However, there was a simpler explanation. The family did not want to go through the hassle of moving their kitchen and preparing a cooking area without the assurance that we were indeed going to come. Why put forth the effort if there is a chance that it will lead nowhere?

We brought a significant amount of food, tomatoes, pepper, oil, onions, flour, dried fish, sugar, and groundnut powder, planning to teach the family to make two different dishes from these staples. The nurse showed the family and the neighbors who gathered how to prepare a healthy porridge from the sugar, flour, and groundnut powder. Azuma refused to eat this porridge and was cranky and appeared uncomfortable. Later she ate a gelatinous mash prepared by the nurse from all the above ingredients. Everyone ate and there were enough ingredients left over to feed the family for the next week. We explained that AfriKids would provide some additional food the following week but that it was not a sustainable alternative. The nurse explained how the family can sell their groundnuts to help pay for the sugar, fish, and other ingredients they lack. The reality was, however, that there were few income-producing options for the family. The family really needed most of their groundnuts and millet to get though the dry season. Even if they did have extra crops to sell, how would they get them to the market? Who or what would they hire to carry them there? These concerns are common to developing sustainable programs for the support of rural families.

As we were eating, Ayisoba stopped by to visit. He expressed concern that the adults in the family—specifically Apaanzo and the other men—would "steal" any of the food we left behind and that the children would not benefit. Others confirmed that this was a distinct possibility. Although I wanted to believe that this was not possible—while recognizing my own cultural assumption that parents "naturally" should prioritize their children's wellbeing, and would never take food from them—Apaanzo's defiant attitude and apparent lack of concern for the children indicated otherwise.

Initially, Apaanzo's defiant and resistive attitude towards us frustrated me—after all, we were there to help his family—but I tried to see it from Apaanzo's perspective. As the head of the family and with a degree of esteem to protect, could we blame him for his defensive attitude? After all, AfriKids approached such families under a rubric of "child rights" and the implicit urgency of Azuma's case in order to have greater freedom to intervene. Although we had been welcomed into the family, Apaanzo may have perceived our involvement as creating a situation in which he had little choice. My initial sense was that he was content with managing their child in a "traditional manner." Yet something did not sit right with me, both within the intervention, and what was happening within the family. That is, I felt there were other circumstances and dynamics beyond the obvious poverty and medical issues that were affecting this family.

Elijah and I continued to check in with Azuma's family. Two weeks after our visit bringing food, we paid another. Apaanzo, still looking run-down and bedraggled, greeted us. Azuma, however, was starting to look better. She was not as cranky, her eyes seemed brighter and she was a bit more active. She could stand without assistance, and take a few steps forward before falling. I asked the mother how she thought Azuma was doing.

"From what people are saying," she responded, "I agree that the child is a spirit child. The child is hiding some features from you to make it appear as if it is not a spirit child. My friends have given birth already, and their children are walking, and are normal human beings. This child, it cannot do anything. It has even given me sickness; I am sick all the time."

"Your health," I asked. "Has it changed?"

"When I took the medicine, I was getting better. Now that I do not have the drugs, I am not as good. The child, it does not sleep, it is always awake. It will never sleep at night." She still looked exhausted and there was desperation in her voice. Although I did not find out until a month later, she was also concerned at the time about a sizable lump in her breast, though she did not disclose this to us.

"Anytime that I want to do anything, the child will be crying. Night and day, it's the same. Anytime I want to do work, it cries."

She told us that she frequently attempted to leave Azuma in the care of other children, but the child would cry incessantly until her mother came back and picked her up. Azuma never left her side, refusing to be left in anyone else's care.

Abiiro reported that Azuma has been eating well and that the other family members were healthy, but interpreted the changes as small. Abiiro emphasized that her leg with the filariasis infection was still bothering her and, again, that Azuma would not stop crying at night. She suggested that AfriKids take Azuma away, as their local medicines were not working for the child. Elijah and I attempted to refocus the conversation but the mother became more persistent in her belief that the child should go away.

Apaanzo, who until this point had been silent and not engaged, spoke up. "As the day breaks, the mother has to go and do work," he told Elijah. "But she can't because she is with the child. Should I follow the standard procedure for a spirit child?"

"The first time we visited," Elijah said, "you said that you had not gone to the diviner to find out if she is really a spirit child."

"That's right," replied Apaanzo. "We are still in doubt because we have not consulted yet."

He paused for a moment, then turned to question Abiiro about the crying and disturbances at night, as if he was unaware of them. He admonished her for not telling him that the child was keeping her awake. He described how he did not know the extent of her spirit child suspicions, partly because Azuma's father, Azaare, was rarely home to talk or even sleep with his family in recent months. Elijah agreed that the father, who was still away, should stay with his wife to see what happens.

Abiiro appeared to become increasingly frustrated and cut Apaanzo off before he could speak again. "Why are you bringing this up?" she demanded. "We should focus on the how AfriKids can help rather than bringing up these things about the family."

"What is your husband saying about the child?" Elijah asked.

"He has no time for me and the child," Abiiro replied. "He wakes up drunk every morning. He doesn't even know his own mind. He just gets up and goes wherever he wants. If the child is crying, he pays no attention. That's been going on for three years now! Even a few nights ago, I had a disagreement with him, I told him it's been three years, and there is no solution to this. I don't even know what he thinks about the child. He's never with the child, so he doesn't care."

She then described an argument with her husband about Azuma, particularly how, before his recent departure, he had agreed to give the little girl a concoction to see if she really was a spirit child. He had told her, she said, that if Ayisoba, the concoction man, declares Azuma to be a spirit child, he himself had no medicine for it. Only Ayisoba had such medicine, so the child should be taken to Ayisoba's place.

It was becoming clearer that Abiiro wanted to be free of the child. AfriKids and Ayisoba were, for her, the only options remaining.

The conversation now shifted back towards Apaanzo and he fueled the argument, saying that Abiiro should simply take Azuma to Ayisoba herself.

"The way that women behave these days!" he exclaimed. "A woman can just go out and do anything. She should just take the child to Ayisoba's house to see if it is a spirit child and it should drink the medicine."

Everyone started talking at once. The two other women present —Abiiro's sisters in-law—argued that it was inappropriate for Apaanzo to leaving everything up to her.

They also claimed that he really knew more about what is happening in the house than he let on and that he was just trying to dodge his responsibilities.

One of the women observed, "The man is at a point where he believes that we should just bring Ayisoba to see if she is really a spirit child. Since AfriKids is here, we should try to solve the problem with them."

Apaanzo appeared fed up with the discussion, "No!" he declared. "We should just bring Ayisoba here."

The woman continued to emphasize that there was no need to bring Ayisoba since AfriKids was present and might be able to help.

Apaanzo refused. "There's no need to hide what is happening here," he said. From his point of view, the concoction man would be able to uncover the spirit child, reveal the truth, and end the discontent in his family. "What Abiiro is saying," he declared, "is that AfriKids should just take the child away. I don't agree with that. She's not been telling us what is really happening. She has to tell us everything she sees in the child and then let the tradition take its course. First the soothsayer, then let the concoction man come and perform the ceremony."

Elijah attempted to bring some calm to the conversation, pointing out that there were differences in the family, and because each person was going in a separate direction, we would not be able to find a solution today. He advised Apaanzo to call a meeting and "sit" with his three other brothers in the family to determine a solution. Apaanzo agreed that sitting, and following the correct decision-making protocol, was the right thing to do, especially since, as he remarked, while glancing towards the women, "These women, they frequently cause confusion for the family. So we have to make sure to take proper care of it."

A few days later, the brothers met and decided they should first see if any treatment could help Azuma before using the concoction. Soon after, Elijah and I returned to their house and took Azuma and her mother to the hospital for a checkup and to a feeding centre in the city for malnourished children and their mothers.

At the center, Azuma and her mother received food and a chance to rest. The swelling in her leg reduced and the lump in her breast was determined to be non-cancerous. Seven weeks after their arrival at the feeding center, Joe and I visited Azuma.

As we entered the building, Abiiro uncharacteristically leapt up and ran to hug me, screaming with joy. She called Azuma, who walked alone across the courtyard towards us. Joe and I were impressed. Both Azuma and her mother had put on weight, their faces were round, and the mother's face glowed. They were different people. Azuma had also spoken her first words a few weeks previous: "*Nma*" ("Mother") and, quite appropriately, "*Mam di*" ("My food").

Azuma and Abiiro lived at the feeding centre for three months. During that time Ayisoba, the concoction man, who was originally uncertain about what AfriKids was doing, visited Azuma and was astonished, even taking 5,000 cedis ($0.60) from his pocket and forcing it into Azuma's hand as if losing a bet. He exclaimed that wonderful things can happen.

Azuma's father never visited during the three months his wife and child were away and I never did have an opportunity to meet him. Apaanzo told me he was at his dry-season farm far in the bush and could not make it. Others insisted he was drunk somewhere and did not care. One neighbor, emphasizing how anti-social the father was, told me a story about how he refused to take his brother to the hospital when the younger man was seriously ill. The neighbor claimed that Azuma's father had said it would be just fine if his brother ended up in the ground next to their father.

The last time I saw Azuma was a little more than a month after their return home. As I was walking up to their compound, I saw her in the distance, running along and playing with the other children. There was still that layer of snot crusted on her upper lip, though cracked this time not by her persistent and concerned grimace, but by her beaming smile.

"Do you still think that she might be a spirit child?" I asked Abriio.

"That's not the case," she replied, glancing toward Azuma. "It was just some sickness. She's not a spirit child. There's no need to call the concoction man."

Esther

Esther was a four-year-old child living in a village when I first met her. Esther's father had sent her and her mother from Accra back home to the north for "treatment."

According to Maria, Esther's mother, the father, who worked as a low-paid general laborer, could not support them both with only one income, so he decided it was best for Esther and her mother to return to his family in the village, and not to return to Accra until the child was taken care of.

Esther's family suspected that she was a spirit child after a serious case of cerebral spinal meningitis left her brain damaged when she was a year old. "It all started with something like a small headache, then a cold," Maria told me. "But, it was midnight when the whole thing became serious." Esther started to have seizures and the health clinic sent her to the district hospital. She stayed in the hospital for two months. When she was sent home from the hospital, she was not able to breastfeed, continued to have petite-mal seizures, and was always crying. When her medication (phenobarbital) ran out, the family refused to allow her to return to the hospital for the required checkup or to purchase more medication, which was too expensive for them at $14 per month. The medication may have stabilized the little girl but the family was expecting it and the hospital treatment to cure her. They were convinced it was not working and took Esther to various local herbalists over the months following her release from the hospital. There was still no improvement in her condition and they began to suspect that she was a spirit child.

"When we came back from the hospital they sent her to so many herbalists," her mother recalled. "Some of the herbalists and family started to say she was a spirit child. I knew it was a sickness, some children fall sick and become paralyzed, so I told them it is sickness. But, they were saying that if it's sickness, how is it that you stay in the hospital for so long and are not cured?"

I asked Maria what her husband said.

"At first," she replied, "he didn't believe she was a spirit child, but at last he believed that she's a spirit child."

It appeared that the ineffective treatments and pressure from his family contributed to his suspicions.

Within a few months after Esther left the hospital, and as her condition continued to deteriorate, the family indicated that they wanted to give Esther the concoction. The mother refused and fled with Esther to Accra where her husband was working. When they arrived in Accra, Esther was not eating. Fortunately, the mother had a friend with a child who suffered from a similar disability. The friend showed her how to feed and care for the Esther. Esther's mother and father decided that it would be best for them to stay in Accra and wait to see if her condition improved. Over the next three years, with her mother's careful attention, Esther grew but she could not walk, talk, respond to sounds or feed herself. Although she was growing, there were no signs of improvement. Her father, exasperated, sent Esther and the mother back to the north to be dealt with traditionally as a spirit child.

Esther's mother was always positive, despite the doctor's discouraging prognosis. We took Esther to the doctor for a check-up and the doctor explained that little could be done to reverse her condition. Her mother placed her faith in God. "What the doctors say is very hard for me. For me, I believe that God can do anything at anytime. When the doctors say they cannot do anything, I leave everything to the hands of God."

As they did for Samuel, AfriKids attempted to find a residential school for disabled children or a home for Esther, but were unable to do so. Edward, the education specialist, also visited with Esther and her mother several times a month, offering support and education. The family members knew that AfriKids was looking for a home and became suspicious of AfriKids' failure to find a solution. "My family was saying that the child was so powerful that AfriKids has been through all the schools and they have not found any for us," Maria explained. "When the family talks about Esther, they do not come in the house, but stand outside and talk. This last time, I heard them saying that the child has some powers."

Three months after Esther and Maria returned from Accra, the situation became more critical. One afternoon, while Esther was napping, her mother left her in the care of a family member and went to the market. As she was leaving the house, she saw a strange man entering but did not think it was unusual until she returned from the market. Esther was crying and something was not right about her. She refused to eat or drink, could not swallow properly, and was acting strange. Later, Esther developed red sores in her mouth and throat. The mother was sure that one of the elder women of the house, maybe her mother-in-law or another, had given Esther the concoction. She suspected that the man entering the compound as she left for the market might have been a concoction man delivering the poison. Family members were strangely silent about what had occurred when she was away at the market, and there were other rumors in the community that a concoction man had come to the house. Over the following two weeks, Esther refused all food and most liquids, then slowly regained her appetite. Maria never left her side again, carrying Esther, with considerable difficulty, everywhere she went.

Several months later, Maria reconnected with her friend in Accra who also had a disabled child and found that her friend was opening her home to other children with disabilities. AfriKids facilitated Esther's trip back to Accra, where she was given a place in this home. At the time of writing, Esther, her mother and father are doing fine.

Nma

Several months into my research, Joe hurried me along one morning to pick up Ayisoba, the concoction man I had been closely working with. Earlier that morning, Ayisoba informed Joe that a family with a spirit child wanted him to "test" the child. Knowing my interest, he invited us along. On our way to the family's house, Ayisoba explained that the family really had a powerful spirit child, and previously had two other concoction men try to send the spirit child away but failed.

Upon arriving at the family's compound, we exchanged greetings with the eight or so men and women present and sat in the shade. Ayisoba explained that he had brought us along because I was interested in learning more about spirit children and because we may have other choices for Nma, the suspected spirit child. Nma, meaning mother, is a generic name given to newborns before an ancestor chooses their name, usually occurring before the child's first birthday. Although Nma hardly appeared to have reached her first birthday, she was actually close to three years old. She looked fragile and malnourished; indeed, at age two, the last time she was weighed, she was, according to her medical card, 7.4kg (16 lbs). She could not stand, crawl or talk and had experienced several episodes of malaria in addition to the primary cause of her current state, a serious case of meningitis when six months old. When I asked about the meningitis, Nma's mother, Atipoka, described how within an hour after coming down with a fever, Nma went into convulsions and even stopped breathing for a short time.

The family took her to the clinic, she was treated and survived. However, since that illness she had stopped developing. Family members described her as being far behind other children her age. "This is her age mate," they said, pulling a much larger child over next to her. "Look at how big he is and all the things that he can do. Why is this one not like that?"

I asked Atinga, the family head how he had discovered Nma was a spirit child. He replied that two years ago, when her sickness started, he and Nma's father went to consult the diviner numerous times and discovered that the child was trying to find a way to kill everyone in the family. At that point, he said, "We knew she was a spirit child."

The family's concern that Nma was planning to kill them took on more importance as we openly discussed the situation in front of her. Atinga feared that since Nma knew what he was trying to do, she would kill him first. "We are fighting," he said. "The child has to go away."

The limited amount of literature on the Kassena or Nankani approach to a spirit child describes it as progressing quickly from detection to death. However, the evidence indicates there is commonly a long period of help-seeking activity before a concoction man is summoned. In the case of Nma, the family described how they took her to the hospital and clinic several times with little success. Even the herbalist they consulted concluded that she could not be helped. The family was running out of choices. "It has been making me suffer a lot," Atipoka said, "always being indoors and having to watch her. She just sits on the ground and cries all the time. That tells me she is not a normal human being."

Joe cut in with a teasing tone of voice. "Does the crying prevent you from sleeping with your husband?" he asked. Atipoka embarrassedly looked downward. Ayisoba, noted in a more serious tone, that Nma wants a younger brother, which is why she stopped breastfeeding.

"Yes," Joe said. "That means her husband will have to have intercourse with her!" Everyone laughed.

Ayisoba shook his head. "Yes, but how can you have something like *this* and go in and have sex with the woman?"

Throughout the morning's discussions, issues surfaced concerning sexuality, reproduction, and the family's desire for another child. Elder family members accused Atipoka of secretly continuing to breastfeed to prevent pregnancy, a claim she denied. The child, she said, refused to eat properly. Refusing to eat—a "failure to thrive" as biomedical health care workers might describe it, is another defining characteristic of a spirit child. Locally, such children are believed to obtain their food from the bush.

As we continued to chat with the family, Ayisoba made repeated attempts to engage Nma. She refused to look at him, though she would look at everyone else. Family members suspiciously noted this inconsistency. Nma was handed to Ayisoba. He gently held her and talked to her in a soft voice but Nma remained motionless, her eyes closed. "Pretending to sleep," someone said. However, she had been wide awake just moments before. Ayisoba raised his voice but was unable to rouse her. Her motionless body was quite rigid. She looked uncomfortable—in fact, she looked dead. Sensing our apprehension, Joe took Nma from Ayisoba's arms. Nma quickly awoke, looked intently at Joe and defecated on him.

"Look at what Ayisoba made her do," someone remarked as others laughed nervously. "This is a very powerful child."

This sparked a flurry of discussion that reinforced suspicions.

"Ayisoba made it go," a man claimed. "Their spirits are battling!"

Even Joe suspected that Nma was really a spirit child. "She doesn't want to return to the bush," he said. "That's why she's behaving that way."

Ayisoba agreed, "I normally have to treat children like this. The child has shown you it is a spirit child for sure and now the child wants to prove it. Look. I haven't given the child anything and she's behaving like that. Why?"

Joe handed Nma to her mother and cleaned himself. Family members continued to make jokes and laugh nervously. Ayisoba asked for some water, indicating he wanted to "test" the child to she what would happen.

I spoke up. "You're not going to give her the concoction, are you?"

"No," Ayisoba replied. "Just some groundnuts from my bag."

"Specially treated groundnuts," Joe clarified, "I don't know if he should do it."

I asked Ayisoba what he put on the groundnuts and he said nothing, but Joe pointed out that the nuts were inside his bag, which containing other powerful sorcery substances. Ayisoba shrugged his shoulders and said that the nuts were not treated. He told the family that they should bring their own nuts so he could give them to the child. Convinced, they allowed Ayisoba to break his nuts into pieces and give them to the child with water. Nma refused to eat them, spitting the nuts and the water out. Ayisoba tried again but she still refused. The meaning of this refusal was obvious to every family member present, and if they needed additional confirmation, it came when Nma urinated on Atipoka after spitting out the final pieces of groundnut. From the local perspective, Nma was doing everything in her power to show that she was a spirit child.

Joe turned to me. "There's nothing we can do," he said. "There are a lot of reasons for why the child is this way but, these people have to do away with it because of the tradition. They know the child cannot survive." While preparing to leave, I considered the frustrating fact that there were no options for Nma.

As we were saying our goodbyes, the family head aggressively confronted me. "It is a snake!" he exclaimed. "Tell me, would you go to sleep at night knowing there was a poisonous snake in your house?"

I was struck by the pragmatic reality that faced the family. Joe and I slowly walked away from Nma's home in the stifling midday heat. Joe was looking straight ahead.

"Really, Aaron," he said. "The child, she is suffering. The family wants to set her free."

We went to the main office to think about the options and talk the situation through. The family was committed to killing the child, as evidenced by the two previous concoction men that visited before Ayisoba, and by the scene we just witnessed. We talked it over with others, but could think of no viable alternative nor a place that could provide 24-hour care for the child. AfriKids determined that the only thing they could do is step away and recommend to the family members that they let the child die naturally.

It was not appropriate to impose our moral framework on what the family should do in this situation. Despite my cultural and moral-relativist mindset and recognition of our different notions of what constituted a human being, it was difficult for me not to see the decision to step away as a death sentence for the child. But from the family's perspective, it wasn't a child, it was a spirit. There was no moral dilemma.

That afternoon, Joe, Ayisoba, and I returned to the house to discuss the lack of options. Joe explained to the family that we could not do anything to help. The family head agreed and remarked that he had suspected this to be the case. Joe encouraged the family to let the child die a natural death, to wait even a week to see what might happen. The family agreed to wait a week but no longer, since this was a serious case. Ayisoba also agreed not to do anything right away, although he added that sometimes these things are *real* and need to be taken care of before they become more of a problem.

Upon returning to Sirigu, I ran into Mathew and Elijah in the market. They had already heard about Nma from Joe and approached me smiling and laughing.

"So," Elijah formally shook my hand. "You've seen some of our wonderful things!"

They asked me to tell them exactly what I *had* seen. I easily shed my biological explanations and described what happened in its entirety: the child shitting on Joe, the child shrinking from Ayisoba's bag, the "spiritual battle" that took place directly in front of me. When I had finished, they seemed quite excited.

"Yes!" they exclaimed. "Yes, you see! It *is* true! These things exist! You have seen it with your own eyes."

I was at a loss for words. "I … I don't know what it to say," I said. I shook my head.

"Some things here," Mathew replied, "cannot be explained."

That morning, I gained insight into how child illness and disability are seen and interpreted from the local perspective. I understood the biological explanations for the things I had seen, but they did not seem quite able to explain how the events unfolded in the way they did. The coincidences overwhelmed me to a point where my scientific rationalism momentarily left and I allowed myself to slip, if just for an hour, into a different frame of mind—gaining insight into what one informant described as, "Our world of African electronics."

Four days later, Ayisoba came to Sirigu to let us know that the family has been pressuring him to come and "finish the child." He told us that even if AfriKids could take Nma, the family was now refusing to give her up, since they feared she was powerful enough to continue to disturb the family as long as she was living. Again, Joe emphasized that things should happen "naturally." "We do not condone the killing of children," he stressed. Behind the word "naturally" however was a recognition that things should unfold the way they normally would in the local context. We both understood what Ayisoba was going to do.

The following week, Elijah and I visited Ayisoba's house.

"Ayisoba," Elijah said after greeting the family. "We came by your house the other day and you were not here. We heard that you have gone to the spirit child's house. We were afraid that the child was very powerful and it killed you there." Everyone laughed.

Ayisoba replied with a serious face, "The child was not able."

"Were you not able?" Elijah asked.

"How would I not be able?" he laughed, "Because my ancestors are here, there is nothing that I fear. Sit down. Let's talk about what happened. When I went there and gave the concoction to the old lady, she gave it to the child, but nothing happened. The child was still lying there. It did not die."

"Was the mother there?" I asked.

"By the time I got there, the mother had left."

Though divination, Ayisoba determined that the previous concoction had failed, as had those of the concoction men before him, because the sacrifices did not contain all the necessary items. To ensure success, Ayisoba and the family head made another sacrifice, being careful to follow exactly what the spirit child wanted, as determined through divination. On the second day, Nma's behavior was "picking up." Ayisoba observed that the people present, "actually knew it was a spirit child." The grandmother administered the second dose. This second concoction also failed.

"I did it a third time," Ayisoba continued. "I gave a third concoction to the child. Shortly after, I went back into the room and found that the child was dead. I went out but by then there was no one at the house. They were all at a funeral. I found the family head and told him that the dongo had caught the child. He came back to the house, went in the room, and saw the child dead. As the other family members were returning, I prepared to take the child to the burial site, but I saw it move, and open its eyes. It was awake!"

He then explained to the family that there must something else that the child wanted and that he would divine in the morning to determine what it was. Ayisoba returned to his home. The next morning he arose early to divine and so determined that the child wanted a special fruit located far in the bush. He found the fruit, performed the necessary sacrifices and sent another child to run and give word to the family that he had completed the sacrifice. Later in the day, the child came back and notified Ayisoba that Nma had died. Ayisoba, who claimed he was very skeptical at this point, walked back to the family's house to confirm the death, take the body to the bush for burial, and complete the necessary ceremony. Although Nma was believed to have accepted her fate and returned to the bush, Ayisoba described how she would not completely let go of this world, and was responsible for making his family sick the following week. "She was not the most dangerous spirit child I've encountered," he said, "but she was close."

Some time later, I discovered that Atipoka, Nma's mother, had fled to the urban area of Kumasi, leaving Nma. I was told that she wanted to get as far away as possible because she feared that the child was going to kill her.

These case studies provide illustrations of help-seeking, decision-making, family dynamics, relationships, struggles, and the diverse local understandings and meanings associated with the spirit child. I offered minimal interpretation to maintain the flow of the narratives, but also to allow the reader to gain insights independent of my interpretations. The final two chapters bring together the descriptions of the spirit child, the case studies, and the ethnographic context in a full analysis of the sentiments and decision-making concerning the spirit child. Finally, within my conclusion, an exegesis of the spirit child phenomenon reveals to us insights into the Nankani sociocultural world and an understanding of what is at stake within the spirit child practice.

CHAPTER 8

Parental Sentiments and Decision-Making

Introduction

This work would be incomplete if I did not address or contribute to the ongoing dialogue concerning *parental* sentiments regarding spirit children. I emphasize parental sentiments rather than the more common notion of maternal love because I feel that we risk missing a great deal by not including and exploring the paternal and the broader family sentiments concerning intentional and non-intentional child mortality. Many academic and non-academic depictions of fathers living within areas of high child mortality—or in areas where infant neglect and infanticide are prevalent—portray patriarchal systems and fathers as either uninvolved or emotionally detached from their children. Evidence supports these depictions in some cases, but there are few detailed accounts of paternal sentiments, experience, and the impact of the larger family system. The general purpose of this chapter is to explore Nankani parental decision-making and sentiments surrounding child mortality in general and the spirit child specifically. Building upon my previous discussion concerning personhood, I also discuss what the spirit child sentiments reveal about Nankani understandings of childhood and personhood in general.

When I discuss the spirit child practice or infanticide, a common question arises. Scholars and non-scholars alike ask, "But why do they *really* do it?" often with the expectation that I will offer a straightforward sociobiologically oriented reply or a response confirming common misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding Africa. After inquiring why, people inevitably follow-up with a question concerning *how* parents are able to neglect or kill their children. "Certainly," some remark, "the ecological constraints force mothers to do this. Do they even have a choice?"

I have always felt that these how and why questions concerning infanticide and parental sentiments around child mortality are more than just scholarly inquiries into the larger complexities of human nature or ways to make interesting conversation. In a Euro-American context, I feel that such questions concern our own larger existential concerns. Inquiring into how *they* could do it is often another way of considering, "Could *I* do it?"

particularly if faced with similar circumstances. I have found that some people upon hearing and seriously considering accounts of selective neglect and infanticide often project themselves onto the other in an attempt to grasp an element of his or her lived reality. In doing so, they subsequently struggle with the perceived strangeness present in making what is for us an unfamiliar and frightening decision to end a child's life. It is in this strangeness and difficulty inherent within such a decision that forces many to want to know more and ask why. Scheper-Hughes attempted to recreate this sense of strangeness in her work on selective neglect and child mortality in Brazil. Her aim was to help readers accept these practices—remote from our own experience—as driven by an "alternative womanly morality" (1992:340).

As we project ourselves into the other's lived experience to better understand their life as well as our own, we bring our own cultural baggage and expectations, often intentionally and unintentionally overlaying these very different contexts with our own cultural expectations and understandings. One of the more common expectations applied to infanticide and parental neglect is the assumption of a universal motherly love.

Although serious anthropological debate concerning universal motherly love did not begin until the mid-1980s, interest and scholarship concerning maternal love and attachment has been the center of psychoanalytic scholarship since its inception (Balint 1949). Interest in maternal sentiments grew within the feminist-oriented movements that assumed a universal notion of womanhood and motherhood. Western-based assumptions grounded these perspectives. Ruddick's (1980) rooting of maternal practices within love and the notion that such love is a human universal is a good example of this perspective at the time.

Regarding maternal love and its relationship to infanticide specifically, psychologists such as Piers (1978) described a universal cause of infanticide practices as being a consequence of the underdevelopment of women and the oppression, emotional starvation, and negative life experiences of victim mothers. In general, she posited that social problems interfered with a basic universal motherly drive. At the same time, sociobiological paradigms gained popularity and focused on applying animal models and frequently outdated and questionable or possibly biased ethnographic evidence to support sociobiological positions concerning infant fitness and parental reproductive investment (cf. Hrdy & Hausfater 1984, Williamson 1978).

Until the mid-1980s few if any scholars had published research that directly addressed the broader sociocultural and political-economic realities that surround maternal sentiments toward child neglect, infanticide, and decision-making—domains that are indispensable to informed theorizing on the notion of a "natural mother." Scheper-Hughes's work on scarcity and maternal thinking was the first to dispute the notion of a universal maternal love. She stated that "maternal thinking and practices are socially produced rather than determined by a psychobiological script of innate or universal emotions"—the very determinants suggested by biomedical literature and feminist scholarship (1985:292).

Scheper-Hughes's work (1992, 1987, 1985) inspired a flurry of support and criticism (the latter particularly from Nations & Rebhum 1988) and marked a much-needed critical shift in recognizing, conceptualizing, and representing the historical and sociocultural realities embedded within maternal sentiments and infanticide practices. Specific criticism of her work suggested that the withdrawal of parental nurturance was due to powerlessness and the consequences of poverty (Nations & Rebhun 1988) rather than the maternal use of selective neglect as an active survival strategy in face of impoverished conditions (Larme 1997:1720-1721, Scheper-Hughes 1985). Recent criticisms address Scheper-Hughes's privileging of culture over biology (Lindholm 2007:186).

Current trends toward biological fundamentalism are altering our understanding of parental sentiments. These deterministic paradigms avoid the larger cultural and political-economic realities, focusing instead on stress hormones and synapses "visible" through neural imagining techniques. Their proponents strive to establish the elemental basis of parental love (Bartels & Zeki 2004) and posit that, in the not so distant future, a paradigm of biological deficiency will provide an answer to *why* or *how* a parent would not love a child in the expected manner or choose to send a child back to the bush.

While biological notions can enhance our understandings, this chapter will argue that we must consider the broader picture surrounding child mortality, parental sentiments, and decision-making. Scholars err when they reduce notions of parental investment and love to parental traits, sociobiological drives, culture, or political-economic and ecological circumstances alone. All these factors play a significant role in the phenomenon of the spirit child, but this holistic perspective must extend beyond a focus solely on the mother—a Euro-American tendency—to include the broader family system.

I am not arguing that studies focused solely upon maternal experiences are flawed, since women in many parts of the world are the primary caregivers and their experience of children is quite unlike that of other family members. However, the prevalent and close association of women with infancy and childhood has traditionally subsumed childhood within gender and feminist perspectives (although this is changing) resulting in a narrow analytical frame that risks missing the understandings and experiences of the larger kin and social group. I have found that child mortality and the spirit child practice among the Nankani clearly illustrates the role that larger kin and social structures play in respect to poverty, culture, beliefs systems, and notions of personhood, all of which in turn shape parental sentiments, experiences, and understandings of children.

My goal in illustrating the parental sentiments and decision-making around child mortality is not to assign blame. I recognize that working with and interpreting data concerning the relationship between parental behavior and child mortality is highly problematic and has far-reaching consequences for research and application (Rassmussen 1994:346). In her discussion of the allocation of blame surrounding the ambiguity of child death in rural Peru, Larme makes the point that "placing blame on individuals, societies, or cultures—or removing them entirely from the analysis—gets us nowhere. Instead, we need to focus on the underlying conditions that contribute to child mortality in a particular locale" (Larme 1997:1721). Indeed, directing blame for the sake of determining who is at fault, rather than addressing underlying structural conditions such as poverty, is unproductive. Focusing on structural factors alone, however, is not enough. As I suggested in the previous paragraph, an integrative understanding of how families respond to misfortune, disability, and child mortality satisfies the representational and ethical commitment to tell the whole story surrounding "events" and reduces the chances that any one individual or factor is blamed.

In the following section I return to the subject of naming and personhood in an attempt to formulate a basis for the sentiments regarding infants and children. I include an ethnographic vignette that illustrates how parents are neither detached nor unconcerned when confronting sick or disabled children. Just because they live in a region with high child mortality does not make the death of a child any easier. Finally, I describe the sentiments surrounding decision-making and the spirit child. In this depiction and analysis we learn more about Nankani childhood and the importance placed on the larger family system.

Child Death and Parental Sentiments

Ethnographic accounts from around the world frequently describe how families do not confer human identity upon an infant until after some postpartum milestone. This milestone often involves naming or some other ritual such as baptism (Hrdy 1999:468). Anthropologists often attribute delayed naming to high infant mortality or difficult ecological conditions and describe it as being indicative of the level of parental investment. Ethnographic accounts suggest that parents name children when they are confident the child will survive (Scheper-Hughes 1992:413).

It is important to not leap from these observations to posit that late-naming practices universally indicate a lack of parental investment. Nankani parents do not bestow a name on infants until several months post-partum and that naming often coincides with an illness experience. We also saw how naming is but one step in the lifelong process towards achieving full personhood. During my fieldwork, however, I found little evidence directly connecting the Nankani's naming practices to parental sentiments. In this section, I want to return to and expand on naming practices and on the notions of personhood discussed in earlier chapters, particularly in respect to family sentiments surrounding children.

Families begin to develop a relationship with the coming infant as soon as the mother recognizes she is pregnant. The father and the family head will consult diviners throughout the pregnancy in an effort to "get to know" and understand the coming child—its gender, what it wants, its destiny within the family. The coming of the child is viewed with ambiguity and it is the child's behavior over the first few months of its life that confirms its intentions towards the family. This does not mean that family members maintain distance or do not love the child until they are positive that it is "for the house." Families engage infants, attempt to interpret their behaviors, and personify or anthropomorphize them from an early age. As mentioned earlier, a child is not born as a full person, but is born with a basic personhood that is further established when the child receives an ancestral name and moves through life. We could attribute this delay in naming to high infant mortality and family members' consequent seeking for assurance that the child will survive before they invest it with a name. If this interpretation is correct, however, how do we interpret the fact that families bestow names when a child is in the throes of illness and near death?

One possibility is that naming does not confer any additional emotional attachment or investment by the family but is a simple social recognition of the child's status within the family and clan. Illness is simply a physical representation of the ancestral battle over the child. Alternatively, families may name infants when death looms because they want the child to enter the ancestral world rather than die unnamed and be forced to roam as a spirit. Such an explanation would seem to confirm the family's attachment to the child and concern for it's wellbeing. Finally, if we consider together the naming process and the infant's first major illness and adopt a broader interpretive context, we can see the resolution of the illness and the bestowal of the name as a rite of passage and an indication that the infant has accepted the name. Such a rite reduces the ambiguity surrounding the infant and furthers the emergence of Nankani personhood by clarifying the child's position within the social structure.

Perhaps they are all correct. Regardless of the interpretation, my point is that despite the dangers and ambiguities associated with infancy, Nankani families love and care for their infants and do not delay bonding with them until after a naming process. There is no strong association between naming and traditional notions of personhood on the one hand and parental sentiments on the other. We can push past the misconception that parents do not form bonds with their infants because of difficult economic or ecological conditions. The context in which Nankani spirit child deaths occur is rarely one of parental indifference and cannot be compared to the stark landscape of Scheper-Hughes's *Death Without Weeping*.

While naming provides some insight into parental sentiments and understanding of infants, additional ethnographic examples from my fieldwork indicate a high level of parental investment in infants. Although there is high infant mortality within the region and families clearly recognized when infants are at considerable risk, I did not observe this to strongly influence parental attachment or result in distancing or death-accepting behaviors. The exceptions are when all options are exhausted and the outcome is placed in God's hands as in the case of Leah. But even Leah's case illustrates the high level of investment in an infant who was clearly near death. Other cases I observed were similar. A child's illness often results in the mobilization of the family's resources and is a significant cause for concern.

Family responses to infant and child death are another area illustrating the level of parental sentiment. Upon the death of a child, I witnessed profound parental grief, despite a taboo forbidding crying upon the death of a child under two years of age. Crying after the death of a child may interfere with the child's passage back to God. If people cry during the burial the child may come back to the house again and be reborn to its mother. Nations & Rebhum's article *Angels with Wet Wings Won't Fly* also described how crying after the death of a child was discouraged (1988). What is important is that the withholding of grief in public does not indicate that parents are cold and indifferent to child mortality. What follows is my experience with one such case in which the parents were profoundly affected by the death of their baby born with severe disabilities.

Early one Monday morning Joe rushed in exclaiming that I had to see a child he'd visited the previous weekend.

"What's happening?" I asked.

"A child," he replied. "It's not good, I can't tell you. You just have to see it." I didn't press him. We hurried to a small community close to Sirigu, about 5km kilometers distance. When we arrived at the family compound, we exchanged greetings with the family members.

The mother emerged from her room limping from a case of filariasis and carrying a child wrapped in a bundle to protect him from the wind and sun. The grandmother also came out of the room to help her. Apoka, the mother, told us the child's name was Azampana. She brought him to us and uncovered him so we could see.

Azampana had bilateral cleft pallet and a badly infected case of spina bifida. His obstructed and labored breathing was loud and upsetting to hear.

"How old is he," I asked the family.

"He's eight days old today," someone responded. I was too absorbed by the child to notice who had spoken. We finished examining the child and covered him back up so Apoka could take him back into the house.

I asked the family what causes this.

"Actually, I cannot tell," replied the family head. "It's the first time I've seen something like this."

Another man remarked, "I think it could be sickness. Or, maybe the woman got an infection when she was pregnant and through [the sickness] the child has those deformities." None of the family members recognized Azampana as a spirit child, primarily because there were no other misfortunes present within the house.

The following day, there seemed little we could do but take Apoka and Azampana to the hospital. By chance, a physician from a British charity and two local doctors happened to be in the area and stopped by the hospital to examine Azampana. They admitted Apoka and Azampana into the maternity ward to stabilize him, treat the infection, and consider if they could transfer the child to a hospital in Accra for the required surgeries. The British doctor was sure that his charity could fund the expenses. After Azampana was in the care of the hospital, Joe and I returned to Sirigu.

Two days later Azampana's father came to Sirigu to tell us that he received a message a few hours previous saying that Azampana had died. Joe and I offered to travel to the city to bring Apoka and Azampana's remains home that afternoon. When we arrived at the hospital there was confusion. Apoka appeared to have left, but the nurses stated that Azampana's body was still at the hospital. They would not let us claim his body until we paid the bill and had the death certificate signed. We stumbled through the bureaucracy, received the certificate, and went to the nurses' station to claim the body and find Apoka. We searched the hospital but Apoka was nowhere to be found and neither was Azampana's body. The nurses claimed to know nothing of the woman's whereabouts and sent us to the mortuary to look for Azampana.

We walked to the fringes of the hospital boundary and approached the house of the mortuary man. We greeted him and his family and made sure to shake hands with his pet macaque monkey sitting on the nearby log. The mortuary man remarked that he didn't remember seeing a baby arriving that day, but we looked inside the morgue just to make sure.

"Maybe you can identify him," he said. He unlocked and opened the large cold stainless steel doors to the refrigerated compartment containing several rows of body-length shelves. I glanced over the eight or so bodies. Azampana was not there but my eyes were drawn to the bodies of two other newborns, both wrapped in scraps of common cloth and resting quietly on the breast of their deceased mother. In that moment, the high infant and maternal mortality of northern Ghana seemed more haunting and real than ever. Here was something sanitized mortality statistics did not show.

Since we could not locate Azampana, we returned to the nurse's station and eventually pieced together what was happening. After Azampana had died, Apoka, weeping uncontrollably, refused to surrender him to the nurses. According to hospital regulations, the nurses could not allow her to take the child home for burial until her hospital bill was paid. Apoka had no money, no way to call home, and no one available to support her. The nurses left her alone with Azampana for a short time, but later she still remained inconsolable and refused to surrender the body. In the end, the nurses decided to let her take Azampana home knowing that AfriKids would pay the hospital bill.

After she left the hospital, Apoka wrapped Azampana on her back in the local style for carrying babies and walked several kilometers to the central taxi stand to find a minibus going to Sirigu. After close to two hours riding in the bus, she walked with Azampana still tightly wrapped upon her back the final five kilometers home.

After I'd heard this story, I found myself imagining what Apoka was feeling while in the hospital, refusing to surrender her child to the morgue or to the afterlife. I found myself imagining what her trip home would have been like. Did the others on the crowded bus notice Azampana? What did Apoka think of the other mothers and children who were undoubtedly present? I tried to see it from her perspective and confront the strangeness of the situation.

The family buried Azampana late that evening outside the entrance to the family compound. Both the mother and father struggled to hold back their tears during the brief ritual.

I have included this vignette as an example of the parental concern and sentiments surrounding a child's death—particularly the circumstances surrounding a disabled and non-viable child, a child that the family tried to save, not leave to die. Finally, those familiar with Scheper-Hughes's work recognize that this scene and the earlier description of Leah are unlike any of her descriptions concerning the detached sentiments and the context of the Alto do Cruzeiro. In the Nankani context, mothers and fathers experience a different sort of death—a "death," certainly, but without weeping for very different reasons.

Spirit Child Decision-Making and Sentiments

During an interview, a woman described the diversity of sentiments mothers may have toward a spirit child:

> When [the men] go to the soothsayer's house and say that a child is trying to kill you [the mother], these women will never go near the child again. Other women, no matter what you do, no matter how the child behaves, they will never give up and allow them to kill the child.

In this section, I explore discuss parental sentiments and decision-making together. Since the emotional realities present in spirit child decision-making were inseparable, my conversations and interviews with community members regarding one domain often evoked the other.

Various ethnographic accounts on Africa fix the responsibility for infanticide on the mother. !Kung women are depicted as having control over the decision for or against infanticide because such a decision is made while giving birth alone in the bush (Shostak 1981:238). Sargent observed among the Bariba that although other members of the family expressed suspicion, the mother is the primary decision-maker when it comes to identifying a "witch baby" (1988:84). Depictions of infanticide also tend to portray decisions or responsibility as black or white. Perhaps, in some other contexts, this is accurate. But in the case of the spirit child, there is enough variation present to make it difficult to indicate definitively who is primarily responsible for instigating the spirit child suspicions. Nor is it possible to pinpoint who consistently supports the decision to send a spirit child to the bush.

In addition to observing and interviewing families with spirit children, I asked many mothers and fathers hypothetical questions concerning what they would do if their child was exhibiting spirit child features, or if rumors about their children emerged. Responses varied. Approximately a quarter of respondents indicated that they would refuse to consider or believe the diagnosis, some indicating that they would actively resist by running away and hiding the child. Those who would accept the diagnosis fell into two categories that are important to distinguish. The first sort agreed that if their child were a spirit child they would support its death. The second and most prevalent group indicated that they would not be comfortable with or immediately agree with the diagnosis. However, they would ultimately consent to surrendering the child or support using the dongo because they felt they had no real power to decide one way or the other. Finally, men tended to be more likely to support spirit child accusations or decisions. It was also apparent that fathers had limited decision-making power, since they were required to abide by the will and decisions of the elders within the family. In what follows, I discuss these findings in detail.

Refusal to Accept the Diagnosis

During a women's group meeting, I asked who initiates the suspicions surrounding an alleged spirit child: Is it the man or the woman? "It's always the men that have the problem," a middle-aged woman replied as she stood to address the room. "Even before a woman is pregnant, some men start going to the soothsayer's house to determine the fate of the child. Many times they will go. Then they finally tell us that it's a spirit child. So it's the men." Conversation continued, with the participants exchanging views and experiences and sometimes contradicting one other. The dominant view of the women's group was that they would not agree with the family's decision or ancestral proclamation. I expected this sort of response in a group setting, and particularly from this group of empowered women. However, the responses of the individual women, particularly ones who were not involved in women's groups, spoke of the reality behind defying a spirit child diagnosis.

Frequent references to the biological dimensions of maternity were used to support the notion that mothers should not give up their children. Both men and women commented not on the mother-child bond and motherly love as commonly associated with maternal instinct, but on more pragmatic dimensions. They noted that because the mothers "suffered" during pregnancy and childbirth, they would never give their child up. "This is the way God made us," remarked one woman. "Being pregnant for nine months and carrying the baby. We know how all the suffering is. The men, they are always roaming about and do not know what's happening. So, when we give birth to children, no matter their condition, we always have mercy for the child. We won't say it's a spirit child and be forced to throw it away." Referring to the case of Esther, I commented to Joe as we examined her that she looked well cared for, clean and well fed. He replied, "You know mothers, they will never leave their children just like that."

I asked mothers if their perspective would change if family members told them that their child was responsible for their illness. Mothers in the women's group indicated that they would not agree. One remarked, "We would allow the child to do whatever harm it caused us. We would not agree that they should kill the child." Few mothers during individual interviews expressed this view. Some of the concoction men I talked with indicated how it is not unusual for a mother to disagree with a decision, even when family members emphasize that the child will kill her.

There was suggestion that, if family members believed that a mother would not agree with the use of the dongo, they would trick or deceive her. Family members may hide the dongo from the mother. If the mother leaves the house to fetch water for example, an older woman in the house may quickly give the child the concoction. We saw this in Esther's case. I asked several mothers what they would do if the family tried to trick them. Their response was evenly divided. Mothers recognized that in such a case they would have little power to do anything. Others remarked that if they suspected that the family was going to trick them, they would run away with the child.

Although risky and requiring significant determination and fearlessness, running away is actually an option for some women. A woman who chooses to run needs to find friends or family members willing to take her in and hide the child. This usually involves traveling to a distant city or urban area. A middle-aged mother remarked, "Women who are very determined won't agree it's a spirit child. There is a woman at my place, who they told had a spirit child. She ran away with the child and then sent the child away somewhere. The family was not able to collect the child and, as of now, the child is living. So, if the women are courageous and they do not entertain any fear, they can find a way out."

I was curious about the logistics behind this process. Would the women be punished or divorced? I asked a man what the consequences were if a woman ran off with a child. "Isn't that serious?" I asked.

"No, you can only hide and take the child away," he responded.

"But can she ever return to the family? What would the husband do?"

"If the condition of the child is better she can return. The husband can't kill her."

"But he can make her life difficult?" I responded

"You see, she has to leave the child somewhere, she has to take the child to a different place. It will be some time, maybe a month. She and the family will not be in good terms for that time, but [the child] will still go away."

As described earlier, although the spirit child is not physically present, its spirit is able to travel back to the family and cause misfortune. Consequently, the disappearance of the child is not enough to relieve family members' concerns. The mother's hope is that the child's physical condition will improve and further misfortune within the family will cease. At that point, family members may accept the child back into the home with the realization that it is not a spirit child after all.

Several spirit child accounts indicated that mothers are able to fight and resist the spirit child diagnosis. I documented four accounts where mothers gave birth to multiple spirit children. Two of these stories illustrated how the mother reached a point where she refused to allow the concoction man to use the dongo on any of her children again, despite the risks such a decision held for her. The following is an example.

> My brother's wife, her first-born child, they said it was a spirit child. They killed that one. They said the second child was a spirit child, but then the woman said that for this child, she would not agree. The woman just came out of the room to the front of the house where we were

> discussing the situation and said that she would not agree that this child was a spirit child, that we should allow the child to do whatever it wanted to do to her. In that case, nothing happened. Now the child is in grade five.

Men also actively disagreed with spirit child diagnoses. I recorded the story of a man who refused to accept that his child was a spirit child, despite his wife's insistence that it was. The child had encephalitis. When the family came back to their home in a nearby village, "Everyone gathered to see the child," remarked the man's brother. "They all described it as a spirit child, but my brother said it was not." Consequently, his wife fled leaving him and the child. "Our family even tried to kill the child, but my brother sent it back to Tamale. That was ten years ago, today the child is very active—even normal. [The child] is better than some children that they say are normal."

Some cases of resistance, however, did not turn out as positively. A woman told me a story about how a father refused to believe his child was a spirit child. As a result, the child killed the mother. Another account described how a man who refused to believe his son was a spirit child retrieved the body buried in the bush and gave it a proper burial near the family compound.

Most of the concoction men told me that they had experienced situations in which family members disagreed with a spirit child diagnosis or treatment. "Some will say that it's a spirit child, while some will say that it is not," one explained. "There are some [cases] where the whole family will agree that [a child] is behaving like a spirit child. If you give birth to children, you will see and watch them grow up and know how they behave." They described spirit children who would take advantage of disagreements to continue their path of destruction. Ayisoba described a case where the mother did not agree. "Later on, the child killed the mother," he said, "At another house nearby, it was also the same thing. The child wanted to kill the father, but the father was able to follow certain things to protect himself and the mother did not. Because the spirit child was unable to kill the father, it went around and killed the mother." Several concoction men indicated that when a family disagrees, the concoction man would advise them to come together "as one voice" before treating the child. Other concoction men remarked that it was irrelevant whether family members agreed or disagreed: if the child was not a spirit child, it would not die.

The case studies in the foregoing chapter illustrated how difficult it is for parents to care for spirit children with disabilities. In the case of Esther and Samuel, we saw how caring for them was a full time job for the mothers and imposed a heavy burden upon them. Esther's mother remarked that caring for her daughter was difficult. I asked her how she did it, and what she would recommend to other mothers in her situation. "It's hard doing what I'm doing," she said. "It's very painful to take care of Esther. But I will not say to just kill the child. If it should die, it should see its own end … It's painful to see other people walking with their children, being free, doing their own things." She concluded that if there was a home for children with disabilities it would be much easier. Samuel's mother also commented on the difficulties of having a spirit child. She was uncomfortable sending him away, but the difficulties of keeping him at home were also significant. "It isn't easy," she said. "You know that this child will not be able to do anything on this earth."

There is No Other Choice

> Some women will easily give the child up. Some of the women run away, because of their love for the child. Some of them, the family will tell them that if you don't do this, something bad will happen. Because of that pressure from the family, they are afraid and they will have to give the child up. Even though they love the child, it's the pressure from the family that makes them.

Women often remarked that even if they objected to the spirit child diagnosis, they had no choice in the matter or were powerless to influence the larger patriarchal decision-making system. A mother remarked, "When the man says that a child is a spirit child, the woman can't dispute that fact. She has to agree. In the house there's nothing I can do because the man has the power. After giving the child up, I will not be happy for a long time." A man remarked that in some cases women have little opportunity to agree or disagree. "The women can't do anything about it. The men decide. Once the men have decided that it is a spirit child, sometimes they come and take the child away without telling the mother. Sometimes the mother will be weeping and they will just ignore her and take the child."

It is important to clarify what community members mean when they identify the "men" as being the primary decision-makers and responsible for taking the spirit child away. "The men" does not necessarily indicate the father, but rather the larger patriarchal decision-making system. Additionally, I found that fathers often have little decision-making power concerning spirit children. A man remarked, "It's the old man in the house who has to go soothsay and make the decisions. The father will have little to say." The decision-making process surrounding children emphasizes the position of the child in relation to the larger family. Recall that a child is not the property of the mother or even the father specifically. A child belongs not to an individual but to the larger family system and represents the perpetuation or discontinuance of that system. Consequently, the father is also subject to the decisions made by the family elders and frequently has little say in matters regarding his own child. Elders make decisions not for individuals, but for the best interests of the larger family and clan.

Some of the people I interviewed indicated that although they did not want to send the child to the bush, they were concerned that it was unavoidable as the child could continue to cause sickness and death in the family. Several people made statements to the effect that, "I would not like to send the child away, but the child will kill me." Another woman expressed concern that it was not up to her, "It's up to the family. I don't want the child to die, but I don't want to die." During individual interviews at the maternal health clinic, I asked numerous mothers if they would agree if told that their child was a spirit child. Most answered no. However, when I asked her to consider how she would feel if she were sick at the time, the responses differed. The following is an example:

"If your family told you that your child was a spirit child, would you agree?"

"No" the mother responded.

"But what if you were sick?" I questioned.

"If I'm sick and they say that it's a spirit child, I will agree that it's a spirit child. I would take that child to the hill. It's because of the child that I'm sick."

"Even if it's that child right there?" I asked, pointing at her infant.

"Yes, because he is making me sick." The mother sensed my astonished reaction and continued. "You see, it will not be easy for me, but I will have to do it because it's making me sick. If I do not do it, I may die. I won't be happy about it, but I have to allow it to happen."

Another mother offered a similar response. "It's not easy. You give birth to a child, and know that the child is not able to do anything on this earth. You have to kill the child, otherwise it will not be something good for the house. You will not be happy." Another woman remarked that if the child is indeed a spirit child, it is out to get her. "If it showed that it wants to kill me by making me sick, I will not have any feelings towards it."

Other mothers not only emphasized concerns over their own health and safety, but the health and safety of other family members whom the spirit child would also attempt to kill. A key element within these responses was that the necessary diagnostic criteria must be present for them to agree. These mothers would not support rumors or suspicion. However, if the child was sick and there was a threat to them or their family, they indicated that they would agree that this was a spirit child.

Mothers primarily emphasized the physical effort and suffering involved in pregnancy and childbirth as being a reason why it would be difficult to give a spirit child up. "It's difficult to be pregnant for nine months and give birth to a child and then say it's a spirit child. It will hit you hard, you will not feel fine at all, but you have no choice. You have to give it up."

Men and women remarked on how very difficult it is to understand why a spirit child had happened to them. A mother told me that it is difficult to believe that one day you can just "wake up and see that you have a spirit child. That is a situation that we never want." A father also commented on the difficulty. "When you give birth to a child like that, it's very difficult to understand why that has happened to you." A concoction man commented that, although it was hard losing his wife to a spirit child, he was deeply concerned about why it happened. "After we found out it was a spirit child and were able to follow the necessary things, I was okay. I knew it would not occur again."

Men who have had a spirit child also remarked on how difficult the experience was and indicated that they had little choice but to send the child to the bush. One man, commenting on the double bind the spirit child placed his family in, stated, "Giving birth to a child is painful. If it's a spirit child, it has to leave or it will kill the mother or father and destroy the family. Giving birth to something that can do that is very painful." Men expressed more distress concerning the origins and why they had a spirit child. A man remarked that he was sad about losing a child, but the hardest part was accepting that the child was from the bush. He stated, "Even if you have a child and it goes back [dies] as a normal human being, it's better than giving birth to a spirit child."

Yes, It is For the Bush

The previous section discussed how parents' agreement that their child was a spirit child might stem from their lack of decision-making power and from the potential outcome of letting such a child live. Although in most cases the final decision about the spirit child rests largely in the hands of the family elders, mothers do play an important role in generating or confirming suspicions. Anyone in the family may initiate suspicions, but those that come from the father or mother of the child have significant power. Previous depictions in the literature and the general discourse concerning the spirit child portray the mother as passive—a victim of the larger social structure. My research, however, indicates that many mothers are not passive recipients or subject to the demands of the larger family structure. Mothers may not play a significant role within larger family decision-making process, but some do play a role in generating and confirming suspicions, or in supporting outright the use of the dongo.

During a group discussion regarding the origin of spirit child suspicions, a mother stated that the suspicion does not always begin with the men. "Sometimes it comes from the woman. It's the women who are sleeping with the child. Sometimes the mother will say the child has been crying in the night or that while they were sleeping they turned to check the child and it was not there. It's the woman who is going to tell the man that the child is behaving that way. How else would the man know? You are informing the man." Others agreed. She pointed out how, after a woman raises suspicions, the head of the house will begin divining and others will closely observe the child's behavior and become more aware of suspicious activities around the house.

In cases where the child does not have the obvious physical characteristics indicating a spirit child, the mother plays a particularly central role in initiating doubts, offering evidence, or confirming existing suspicions. This is due, in part, to the fact that fathers have limited knowledge of what infants are doing at night, since they often sleep in a separate room while the child is still young. As described by the woman in the preceding paragraph, a mother can mention to family members that the child is crying excessively, acting strange, or has disappeared at night. In fact, the mother is the person most aware the behavioral characteristics used to diagnose a spirit child. All mothers know that if they tell other family members that their child is refusing to feed, looking at them strangely, or crying excessively, spirit child suspicions will be generated or confirmed. We saw this in the case of Azuma and her mother. The mother consistently raised questions and complained about the child's behavior, fully aware that she was supporting spirit child suspicions.

The mothers who reported they would tell family members if they suspected their child was a spirit child also reported that they would support testing the child with the dongo. Several justified this choice by referring to the belief that a spirit child can kill its mother. "If I die," remarked one woman, "I'll be unable to have children. If I live, I can have more." Another woman stated, "Yes, I would suffer, but it's for the best. [The child] could easily kill me and finish the family." Some fears surrounding the spirit child were quite strong, for example, a mother, while feeding her six-month-old child, remarked, "If the man goes soothsaying and comes back saying it's a spirit child, I won't even touch it. They should just go and kill it." Nma's case also illustrates how a mother might run away out of fear of the child. Finally, where suspicions arise or divination confirms a spirit child and the mother does not resist or offer evidence otherwise, her lack of response is interpreted by the family as silent acquiescence.

Concluding Thoughts on Decision-Making and Sentiments

This chapter has examined the parental sentiments associated with decision-making process regarding the spirit child. We saw that the child's parents are not solely responsible for spirit child decisions. Rather the larger family system shapes the suspicions and diagnosis of the spirit child. While the patriarchal decision-making system has a powerful final say, we see how both parents can play a role in generating or confirming suspicions concerning a child's behavior. There are many variables present in constructing a spirit child diagnosis and each spirit child case demonstrates a unique combination of decision-making elements.

In my research, parents who resisted the spirit child diagnosis or indicated they would resist, tended to have some formal education or were part of a women's organization. It was clear that men and women who felt empowered were able to question the suspicions and diagnosis and assume a greater caretaking burden when the child was disabled. But mothers who had simply attended maternal and antenatal care did not show increased empowerment surrounding spirit child situations.

Although numerous factors may go into defining a spirit child, it is clear that there must be a degree of ambiguity surrounding the child and sufficient evidence to support the diagnosis. Family members will not agree a child is a spirit child if the evidence is incomplete. Even when overwhelming evidence is available, parents often remain unsure. A concoction man remarked that even if a father comes back to say that his child is a spirit child, "It will worry him a lot. He will disagree that his child is a spirit child unless it's really proven through the soothsayer's house that it's a spirit child."

The grief surrounding Azampana, a child with no likelihood for survival, was deep and illustrates—as Shostak also notes in her observations with the !Kung—that living within an area of high infant mortality does not make the pain resulting from the illness and death of a child any less profound (1981:182). Parents also grieve and experience a sense of loss surrounding a spirit child and the question naturally arises: Is the experience and sentiment surrounding loss of the spirit child similar to the loss of a child that is "for the family"? This is difficult to answer at present because, in an effort to compare the two, I am still attempting to understand how parents experience the loss of a "for the family" child. However, I *was* able to gain a sense of how the loss of a spirit child is experienced and on this basis I can share my initial thoughts on this question.

To understand the sentiments Nankani family members have towards a spirit child requires an understanding of how Nankani people understand "children" and the difference between normality and abnormality and its consequences on Nankani personhood. It is important to reiterate that the spirit child is not a human being. It does not even have the beginnings of basic personhood as an infant or child identified for the house does. For those that believe that the child is indeed a spirit child, sending it back to the bush is not the equivalent of murder. Accordingly, I tentatively posit that the sentiments surrounding the death of a spirit child are different from that of a normal child. There is no doubt that parent's love their children, but a spirit child is not their child.

The discourse concerning the sentiments surrounding the death of a spirit child indicate that it is not the loss of a specific person that is painful to family members, but the loss of what child was supposed to be or could have been. A normal child is born with the elements of basic personhood. These basic notions are questioned when a child is born into ambiguous circumstances or displays ambiguous physical or behavioral traits. Ambiguity and abnormality stand in contrast to family members' understandings of a normal human being (nerisaala vua), which is an essential element of personhood. Because a child's personhood is so tenuous, and personhood itself for a human of any age can be given and taken, a child's status can easily change to something that does not belong in the family. Because family members do not mourn the death of the individual spirit child because it was not human, the sadness and loss they experience concerns the foreclosure of an expectation of what the spirit child was supposed to become.

Sentiments concerning the spirit child also reflected greater concern over how the spirit child entered the family, or what caused such a child. Maternal and paternal discourse indicates significant concern over the suffering and pain involved in giving birth to and caring for a child, but not the loss of a person, or personality.

Although the death of a spirit child is not the death of a potential person, families still do not take it lightly. Families do not want to believe that such a child could enter their house and they place significant effort on making sure their diagnosis is correct. Families do not use the spirit child diagnosis as an easy way to deal with a disabled child. There are numerous children with disabilities in the area, and having a disability does not mean that one is a spirit child. As we have seen, various other characteristics must be present. Additionally, the cost, stress, and anxiety involved in sending a child to the bush is something that families want to avoid. While some of the discourse makes it look as if it were a quick and easy decision, it is in really much longer and more difficult.

In closing, I feel it is important to address the local perceptions concerning the value of children in order to further contextualize the spirit child practice. At an obvious level, community members all recognize that the perpetuation of the family and clan, a central priority, necessitates children. Despite the need to perpetuate the clan and the related sociobiological implications, community members do not regard children as simply a means to a retirement or the afterlife. They cherish them and any observation of a Nankani family shows that children enrich the experiences of *this* life. With this said, I explore how the Nankani experience of children and the family differs from Euro-American experience.

First, Euro-American notions of children position them more as individuals within the nuclear family system. The Nankani understand and position children as being part of the larger family system. Second, there is often the assumption in Euro-American society that parents should and would do anything to ensure the survival of their child, including risking their life, and that such attitudes towards one's children are only natural. The Nankani do not share this view. I am not saying that Nankani families do not do everything possible to help their children; we have already seen that this is the case with Leah and Azampana. However, this obligation is enacted only up to a certain point. This tipping point is central to understanding the *why* behind the spirit child.

Attitudes towards sick, disabled, or even healthy children change when families perceive them as a threat to a family member or the larger family system. This is central in distinguishing the point at which a sick or disabled child becomes a spirit child. We see this concern arising in the frequent statements indicating that a child is "looking" for a way to kill the mother or father or to destroy the family. It is at this point that the urgency concerning a suspected spirit child grows. The health and safety of an established person or known family member trumps an ambiguous newcomer.

Nankani family members emphasize that although children are very important, the needs of the larger family system outweigh the value placed on a single individual, child, or adult. Families frequently act and make choices that are in the best interest of the family, not the individual. The spirit child represents one of the most significant threats to the larger family system. With this understanding in place, the following questions remain: What are the specific threats that the spirit child symbolically manifests? What does the spirit child discourse and practice show us about the Nankani sociocultural and moral world? The conclusion addresses these issues.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusions: Clarifying Ambiguity, Boundaries, and Moral Worlds

In previous chapters I've examined some central themes of the Nankani sociocultural world and described the spirit child as a discursive phenomenon and practice within that world.

In this conclusion, I refine this positioning of the spirit child through an examination of the interplay between the sociocultural and the critical concerns that the spirit child evokes in families as both an event and a metaphor. In other words, I examine how the sentiments, symbolism, and associations of the spirit child phenomenon focus family attention, and in doing so I find that the spirit child is an active element within the Nankani moral imagination, one that illustrates how people can live "a moral life amidst uncertainties and danger" (Kleinman 2006).

I next discuss how the spirit child functions as a metaphor for concerns about continuity of family and the preservation of familial boundaries, particularly boundaries related to reproduction and sexuality. I describe how the spirit child also functions as a metaphor for disability and the danger associated with physical and spiritual ambiguity. I illustrate the spirit child's role as a scapegoat and describe how spirit child beliefs and practices are understood in reference to migration and modernity. I conclude by considering that the spirit child practice, despite contextual differences, may not be so far from the Euro-American history and understandings of disabled and suffering infants, and I question whether infanticide is truly an appropriate description of the spirit child phenomena.

As a first step and building upon the previous chapters, I present five important points to clarify the context and practice of the spirit child before moving on to a more detailed analysis.

Clarification and Analysis

Variation is the Rule

There is considerable variation present in the spirit child practice. As we have seen in previously, not all families believe in the spirit child. Other families believe in spirit children but do not believe it to run in a heritable sense within a family. Still other families believe that the spirit child will leave families on their own volition. Within those families that treat the spirit child with the dongo, there is significant variation in what combinations of diagnostic criteria are necessary to confirm its existence. There is also significant diversity in the concoction men's treatment methods and in how each family will choose to pursue treatment. Variations in the family's socioeconomic position are also a factor, since the spirit child phenomenon is not limited only to those living in poverty.[13]

I emphasize the differences within this segment of Nankani society because traditional ethnographic research in the region, particularly Fortes' work, portrayed the people of the Volta Basin as more or less internally homogenous. The spirit child provides an example of how one practice varies significantly even within a small portion of a society. In view of the variation the present spirit child research uncovered in the communities I worked with, one can expect to encounter greater variation in the phenomenon when moving further away to neighboring ethnic groups. Yet despite the differences in the spirit child discourse and practice among families I worked with, there are a number of common themes and concerns. The remainder of this conclusion will address these.

Belief and Rationality

I feel it is important to emphasize that the spirit child is a very real, tangible threat to Nankani families. It is not a practice without logic. Families clearly articulate reasons for the existence of the spirit child. Similar to Evans-Pritchard's study that identified how Azande witchcraft and sorcery are rational beliefs that explain misfortune (1976), elements of the spirit child beliefs represent attempts to explain unfortunate events and specifically to search for the truth and meaning within those events.

We have seen examples of how the spirit child exists for the Nankani people, but how do the oft-fantastic narratives (from our perspective) associated with the spirit child speak the "truth" when they appear outrageous? I believe that answer to this depends on how we frame or interpret truth. I found, as have others working in Africa (cf. White

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[13] In this case, poverty as defined in relation to others in the community, not globally.

2000), that Nankani people speak of truth not from the Euro-American understanding of truth—as an accurate depiction of one's experience—but that they often construct and repeat stories that most forcibly get their points across and that are more likely to carry the values and meanings important to them (White 2000:30). People speak of spirit children as a way to understand, explain, and communicate what and why misfortunes or other events happen (White 2000). In her discussion of rumors in colonial Africa, White asks, "Can accounts really purge themselves of the fantastic, especially when the fantastic contains debates about the real?" (2000:66).

Perhaps some things are not entirely explainable by science and perhaps accounts of some events are best left to local descriptions. During my experience with Nma, as described in her case study, I witnessed a rather unusual combination of behaviors and events that seemed better explained from the local perspective than from only a biological orientation, since the family was able to explain what we might describe as coincidence. After my experience observing Nma it was easier to understand how family members interpret a child's strange behavior. Even the story I created to explain Nma to Elijah and Mathew illustrates how my own biological perspective could not explain everything, and that some elements might best be left to what is locally understood as "African electronics." Just because some events or narratives appear fantastic or unexplainable does not mean that they are not real. One may find that the stories told about such events and the meanings that they communicate tell us much about the local sociocultural world and what is at stake for families.

What is at Stake?

"We can only understand the experience of suffering by seeing subjects in 'local moral worlds' and asking what is at stake for them" (Kleinman & Kleinman 1991 in White 1997:4). What is at stake in the spirit child phenomenon? Despite the complexity of the phenomenon, the answer is simple: the family. A central concern of Nankani families centers around managing threats to the integrity and continuity of their family system. The spirit child embodies this concern. Serious threats to the family come from a variety of directions, but the most severe are threats that would disrupt or end the lineage. This includes the early death of family members, illegitimate children, sterility, and any misfortune or hardship that may result in those, such as famine and illness. The end of the patrilineal line is a disaster for Nankani families and has serious consequences. The end of the lineage on earth results in the termination of support for the ancestors and eventually the end of ancestral existence. Essentially, a person's afterlife is largely dependent on his decedents making sacrifices and "feeding" them from this world.

I received frequent comments indicating that the spirit child was a "destroyer" of families. Community members made it clear that the goal of the spirit child was to instigate misfortunes directed at disabling, disrupting, and eventually ending the family. Through examining the spirit child and these misfortunes, we see that the spirit child embodies many of the threats to the family's existence, which I discuss in detail shortly. When a misfortune occurs within the family, it not only raises questions concerning why, but also evokes larger moral questions and concerns (Reynolds-Whyte 1997:3). The spirit child is used as a way to better understand and control uncertainties. The process is dialectical, that is, spirit child beliefs shape the local experience of misfortune, as the misfortune shapes the experience and understanding of the spirit child.

Death Due to Dongo?

The previous assumption within the literature and discourse among researchers was that the concoction men were responsible for all the deaths described as deaths of spirit children. Earlier I pointed out that many of the deaths associated with the spirit child are not a result of concoctions, that is, many deaths described as spirit child deaths are actually a result of biological causes such as malaria. In these cases, we find that families determine though divination that the child died because it was a spirit child and it wanted to return to the bush on its own. In other words, we see that families use the spirit child as an explanatory model. In my contact with community members, the use of the spirit child as an explanatory model makes up the largest proportion of deaths described as related to spirit children.

Children described as spirit children also die from the use of the dongo employed as a ritual or symbolic object. Typically these are children who are touched with or given the dongo to wear to facilitate their death. In these cases, the dongo is said to have "caught the child," although biologically speaking, the family did not induce the death of the child and no concoction was given. In some cases, if the concoction is given, it is after the child's death to ensure that the spirit does not return. But what about the deaths described by community members as resulting from the concoction, and what is really causing the deaths of these children?

During the initial stages of my research, I assumed that all spirit child deaths were infanticidal and a result of poisoning by a concoction. In practice, deaths due to poisoning are relatively infrequent compared with the spirit child deaths that were not intentional. Upon finding that families use the spirit child as an explanatory model for child mortality, I wondered what was really happening in cases where children are actually given the concoction. Particularly, I questioned if the concoction was the actual cause of their death and if infanticide was involved at all.

During a community meeting, a woman emphasized that the death of the spirit child was not necessarily dependent on the power of the dongo, but involved the beliefs of the family and the spirit child's natural inclination to want to return to the bush. She described families that understand the spirit child as more of an explanatory model for child mortality:

> It is not the dongo that is killing the children, but the children themselves that are dying. There are other families that don't believe in the spirit child, so they don't give them the dongo or the medicine and they still die. So it's not the dongo that is killing the children, but they have to die because they are spirit children. They will die on their own. That is their belief. For my family, when we give birth to a spirit child, if it is a spirit child, it will go on its own.

Other community members agreed with the woman that this was true for some families.

The most common community belief surrounding spirit child deaths is that the cause of death is primarily spiritual, that is, the dongo causes the child to die or the child itself decides to return to the bush on its own. The concoction men described how the cause of death was a combination of the dongo power (*dongo panga*) and the powers of the black medicine contained in the dongo. A concoction man remarked during a group meeting: "It is not the dongo alone. It is like a cutlass. If you don't take the cutlass out to cut something, the cutlass cannot get up to cut something itself. It is the dongo power."

As my research progressed, I examined the concoctions used, their administration, and what families and the concoction men reported happening after the spirit child drank a concoction. Again, there was a tremendous amount of variation reported in concoction-giving practices and the composition of the concoction itself. I classify the variations in concoction preparation and administration in three ways:

1) The concoction men who simply pour water over the outside of dongo and give the spiritually imbued water to the child to drink, or they simply place the dongo on or near the child and do not give a concoction. If the child dies it is a spirit child; if it does not die, it is not a spirit child. Three of the concoction men I encountered used this method.

2) The concoction men that use only the black medicine contained inside the dongo. Ayisoba is one of these men. He uses unheated water and a teaspoon full of the black medicine. The black medicine does not dissolve in the water and the child does not consume all the water. In this case, it is difficult to determine if the child consumes much of the black medicine. Two of the concoction men I interviewed use this method.

3) Finally, there are the concoction men who use the black medicine and prepare an herbal infusion. The most common local herb used is the root of the bunbunlia. The majority of the concoction men (ten) I interviewed used an herbal infusion with or without the addition of the black medicine. The spirit child was made to either consume a great quantity of the medicine or only a small amount, depending on the concoction man's tradition. These concoction men indicated that even a small amount of the concoction was enough to catch a spirit.

I recorded several cases where the concoction men and community members described what physically happens to a spirit child after the dongo has caught it. Families and the concoction men both indicated that the consistency of the child's feces is the primary indicator that the child is a spirit child or that the dongo has caught the child. "It will not look like the feces of a normal human," a woman told me. "The child will keep releasing animal-like feces. That is how you know it is not a normal child. It keeps doing that until it becomes tired and dies." Alternatively, community members and concoction men remarked that if the child does not urinate or defecate after receiving the concoction, it means that it is not a spirit child. A woman indicated, "In the olden days, when they use the bunbunlia and the child drank it, when the child started vomiting or urinating or passing feces it was a spirit child. When the child didn't do those things, it is not a spirit child."

After Nma died, I talked with Ayisoba about what he did and the physiological events he observed that surrounded her death. Ayisoba remarked, "She was passing feces, but still eating. But when the medicine and the dongo started working, when she passed feces they were not like those of a normal human being."

I tried to get this clear. "So when the dongo started working the feces looked different?"

"They were different," he replied

"Was she running diarrhea?"

"Not when she took the first one … The first one she was passing feces like a normal human and on the second day it was the same. The third day was different. She was passing feces like the saliva. Mucus."

It is notable that Nma was subject to three separate concoction men, and the final concoction man, Ayisoba, needed to give her three doses. This is important for two reasons. First, it differs from what families and concoction men say about the spirit child diagnostic process. Earlier I reported that all community members stated that a child is not a spirit child if you give it the concoction and it does not die. However, I documented at least three cases where families firmly believed that a child was a spirit child and repeatedly administered the concoction, citing that the child was "wise" and would spit it out. Or, as in the case of Nma, the family failed to perform the correct sacrifices to send the spirit away. In practice, surviving the trial by dongo and the concoction did not always guarantee that the child was not a spirit child. I determined that for some families, if they are committed to the spirit child diagnosis and have firm evidence that the child is a spirit child, multiple concoction administrations might be necessary.

The fact that it often takes multiple attempts to cause death is noteworthy for other reasons. Short of an actual analysis of the concoction, I suspected that the poisonous qualities of the concoction and black medicine are not very strong, as evidenced by the preparation and use. Although the concoction may be weak, I posit that in children who are already malnourished, physically weak, or ill—which most of the spirit children are —a mild toxin that can dehydrate or discourage a child from eating or drinking may speed its death. The concoction, regardless of its strength, is going to be more effective in a sick or malnourished child. Alternatively, a healthy child is less likely to die, particularly if the family tests it only once, it survives, and they do not attempt again.

One final factor may contribute to the death of spirit children: a change in the level of care. Community members described how family members may decrease the level of care offered to a spirit child. Family members, fearing that the child may kill them or make them sick, might change their level of interaction with the child and not hold or feed it as often. While many community members suggested that this was possible, I did not observe any cases of outright neglect. Concoction men told me that the norm is for family members to continue to care for the child after the concoction is given and they provided little evidence that indicated otherwise.

I emphasize that the spirit child deaths resulting from human intentions are not as common as originally perceived. The majority of spirit children who die are quite ill or disabled and die naturally without the assistance of a concoction. In cases where a concoction is used, and assuming that the concoction is poisonous, the concoction may in fact only facilitate the inevitable in sick or weakened children. It appears that it is rare that a concoction is used successfully on a healthy child.

Additionally, I want to stress that the majority of spirit child cases are not urgent in the sense that a family suddenly decides they have a spirit child and seeks the concoction. Within the case studies, we saw how decisions were the result of months or years of suspicion acting in conjunction with medical and developmental issues. Cases described as urgent appear so when they become crucial and public, when the family is positive that a child is a spirit child and is a threat. The urgency arises because the family has discovered the true nature of the child and they fear that the child is actively attempting to cause further misfortune and death in the family. In cases such as these, although it may appear that the decision surrounding a spirit child occurred in haste, suspicions and tensions were building long before it reached a point of urgency.

When a spirit child dies due to intentional causes, families do not consider their actions as murder, since the spirit child is not a person or a human being. The concoction men perceive their services as a treatment for children and families and do not view their actions as "killing children." According to many traditional community members, the concoction men are dedicated to saving, not taking lives. However, the modern discourse concerning the spirit child and the emerging external awareness is framing all dimensions of the practice as murder or infanticide. As we will continue to see, these modern characterizations are not necessarily accurate.

I include this discussion because I believe it helps clarify what is really happening in the spirit child practice and may help to reduce the stigma and representational concerns associated with the spirit child phenomenon, since, for instance, the concoction men in many cases are not directly causing the death of the child. In fact, based on my evidence, I find it increasingly difficult to represent the spirit child as an infanticide practice, particularly since the majority of the cases do not involve the intentional death of the child. In the cases where the child is given a concoction that causes its death, I posit that it is more likely a form of euthanasia than a form of infanticide. I treat the subject of euthanasia in the final section of this conclusion.

The spirit child among the Nankani is not an urgent public health concern. It is not necessarily an epidemic in need of "eradication." Rather, elements of the spirit child phenomenon exemplify the root public health issues confronting Nankani life: poverty, food security, infant and maternal healthcare, free access to basic health care, and options for families with disabled children. In the past ten years, improved access to maternal and infant health programs and education are making a significant impact on the health of families and ultimately the spirit child through an overall reduction in maternal and child morality and related complications.

Fatalism

Scholars have often depicted African traditional thought as being predominantly fatalistic (Jackson 1989:48). Academic assertions have been supported with descriptions of fatalistic beliefs such as "pre-natal destiny" (Fortes 1949, 1986) and other related constructs. Often accounts such as Fortes' do not place a needed emphasis on how beliefs about one's destiny are practiced or how destiny can be averted or changed in practice. Scholars and development workers also describe fatalistic beliefs that form part of individual and community decision-making and responses to misfortune. In Leah's case we see how my own initial impressions incorrectly framed the family's response as being initially and primarily fatalistic.

It is easy to interpret decisions and sentiments surrounding misfortune as being a result of fatalistic beliefs. But my research has persuaded me that when we closely consider family experiences, decision-making practices, and their broader sociocultural as well as political-economic context, it becomes more difficult to attribute people's decisions to fatalism. Beyond that, the very notions of fatalism in Africa may be based on flawed scholarship. Jackson describes fatalism as an "Orientalist tactic" employed in the non-Western world to write off what is in reality a valid form of reasoning (2007:39). These evaluations of fatalism fail to "distinguish between the retrospective rationalizations of misfortune (which tend in all societies to smack of fatalism and resignation) and the attitudes people adopt to face life" (Jackson 1989:48). Perhaps it is better to recognize that fatalism is another valid way of understanding the world and another way to reckon with adversity (Jackson 2007:39).

I raise the issue of fatalism in relation to the spirit child and child mortality in an attempt to answer the possible assertions that the spirit child, as either an explanatory model or the intentional cause of death, is a result of fatalistic beliefs. Scheper-Hughes illustrates how parents give-up on sick children that could be saved with medical treatment, claiming that it is God's will that their children were taken from this world or that they were destined to die (1992). I found that this is not the case with the spirit child.

Nations and Rehbun (1988), in their research conducted near the field site where Scheper-Hughes collected data for her book *Death Without Weeping* (1992), found that poor Brazilian mothers' failure to obtain medical care for severally ill children was due to real-life bureaucratic and geographic barriers, not "death-accepting" behavior—fatalism—or neglectful attitudes. Even more significant was their finding that parental decisions to seek (or not seek) care or treat severely ill infants were not based on assessments made by individuals but on consultations with traditional healers and family members in accord with a folk classification system for infant illnesses. Just as biomedical practitioners have models for determining which children in an intensive care unit should live or die, traditional healers and local health workers apply a similar medical decision-making process to determine the appropriate level of infant care (Nations & Rehbun 1988). In other words, traditional and local biomedical healers also have the concept of what characterizes a "high-risk child"—a child who is beyond their power to save.

The spirit children I encountered were perceived by families as high-risk children in one or more ways. They either were physically at risk due to disability or chronic illness, or were spiritually dangerous and their presence was regarded as a spiritual risk to the family (and often it was both). Families had a clear idea of what children would or would not survive. Even if family members appeared to be fatalistic in their decision-making concerning spirit children, such a presentation or affect is not indicative of the decision-making surrounding a spirit child. It is much more complex. In the cases I observed, parents will engage in a long period of help-seeking before coming to the spirit child diagnosis. We should not interpret statements attributing spirit child characteristics to a child as giving up or as a form of fatalism. Rather, parents are working within the pragmatic realities of the larger decision-making framework and specific beliefs surrounding risky children.

From a local perspective, the decision to send a child back to the bush is not necessarily giving up or surrendering the child to fate. It is a step to take control of misfortune and suffering and a way to eliminate ambiguity. Sending the child back to the bush is not surrendering, but acting upon the world to resolve a threat to the family.

Having clarified these key points related to the spirit child, the following sections examine the crucial concerns that the spirit child phenomenon and its related events exemplify within families.

The Moral Imagination

By examining the role that the spirit child plays in the Nankani moral imagination, we can come to a better understanding of how the qualities of the spirit child and the moral implications of its existence are a reflection of the Nankani moral world and Nankani concerns about a moral existence and responsibility.

In a broad sense, "the moral" refers to values that we express and enact and things that matter most to us. It is not synonymous with good. What one community may consider moral behavior, another would view as a terrible act. Since the moral is embedded in one's community, when we discuss the moral, we are talking about the local (Kleinman 2006:1-2). According to Fesmire (2003:2), central to the moral is the question: How should we live and make sense of our experience? Moral understandings and beliefs, particularly from the perspective of the philosopher John Dewey, are embedded within the social and historical, and involve imaginative, creative, and dramatic elements (Fesmire 2003:2-4). The key point is that our understandings of moral worlds and the moral imagination cannot be divorced from the social. Ethnographic research in moral worlds provides remarkable insight into the enactment of moral questions—how one should live—and how meaning is generated.

The imaginary is a space to present imperceptible or non-existent objects to our consciousness. Particularly when confronted with ambiguous or indeterminate situations, we enact the imaginary in an effort to resolve conflict, ambiguity, or to envision opportunities, solutions, and outcomes. The imaginary is central to our ability to "conjure" objects that do not exist in a strict sense and is central to the process of desiring what may be regarded as socially unacceptable (Jackson 2007:132, Sartre 1940).

When speaking of a "moral imagination," I am referring to a process and space where an individual or group is able to "envision" and discern a variety of "possibilities" for thought and action. This includes envisioning the possibility of a "morally better or worse world than the one in which we live" (Livingston 2005:19), as well as the potential to help or harm others (Johnson 1993).

The spirit child is an agent within the Nankani moral imagination. The bush is the space where the possibilities of Being reside, a space in which the moral imagination resides and is enacted, and a space in which the spirit child dwells. While "everyday consciousness" is associated with village and domestic life, Devisch describes an "imaginative unconscious" as finding expression not within the individual psyche or repressed neurosis such as psychoanalytic models describe, but in the hunter or sorcerer roaming "the depths of the forest in search of unknown and untamed forms of being and forces belonging to an extraordinary realm far beyond the domestic order" (1999:60). I liken Devisch's imaginative unconscious to the Nankani moral imagination.

In the West African context, Devisch's notion of the unconscious as dwelling external to the person is important. Classic Freudian psychoanalytic paradigms not adapted to African contexts have limited validity. This is quite apparent in attempts to apply the construct of an unconscious to African people. First, an African psychoanalytic perspective needs to examine the broader circumstances in one's life, particularly the bodily and social fields (Jackson 1989:45). Second, Euro-American psychoanalytic approaches posit the origin of hidden determinants or unconscious drives as existing within the individual. In contrast, African notions of the unconscious dwell externally in a place that is "not so much a region of the mind as it is a region in space, the inscrutable realm of night and of the wilderness, filled with bush spirits, witches, sorcerers, enemies" (Jackson 1989:45)—and, I might add, spirit children.

The Nankani's use of the bush and its denizen spirits in discourse are a way to make sense of, or understand and imagine possibilities for action and ways of living. In the conversations of several men, I noticed how the bush spirits and the spirit children were used as characters to imagine outcomes and express fantasies and behaviors that would, if practiced, be considered socially inappropriate. Depictions of spirits and the spirit children engaging in untamed wild actions or fantasies occur with frequency in the moral imagination, free from the "snares and ambiguities of the immediate lifeworld … [the moral imagination] can promise possibilities that cannot be realized in flesh and blood in the here and now" (Jackson 1998:47). Like Jackson, I view the bush and its inhabitants as a space where "human intentions, desires, or dispositions are realized in relation to many possible objects and goals" (2007:133).

The narratives and discourse concerning male spirits depict them doing things that no man[14] would be able to do. We have seen how the spirit child is able to have indiscriminate intercourse with women when they expose themselves—sexual relationships without consequence—and has the ability to transgress boundaries, act with impunity, and steal food or another's possessions. The spirit child can invisibly observe and follow women and approach them while bathing at night. The spirit child also receives all the "good things" in the family without having to work, and is closely cared for. A man describes how a spirit child has manly desires but is able to act outside of the limits of the socially appropriate: "As they are saying, the spirit is like a wind that is roaming, so it sees everything as you cannot see. [The spirit child] is also like man—it has sexual feelings. If a woman is standing like that, urinating or bending over, the spirit can easily have intercourse with the woman and she can give birth to a spirit child."

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[14] I use "man" since the majority of discourse I recorded concerning spirits involved male related behaviors or were about male spirits.

The discourse concerning spirit child's antisocial actions—its activities in the bush or moral imagination—also functions as a warning that these actions or impulses have consequences and are not socially acceptable. The narratives direct attention to concerns regarding wives and young women who must, for instance, be protected from desirous spirits—or desirous men—lest misfortune result. People will reference the spirit child to help make sense of someone's actions and use the spirit child to understand and attribute an origin to the anti-social acts that threaten to disrupt the family. For example, someone may admonish a thief to stop acting like a spirit child. The discourse concerning the spirit child and its use to describe behavior directly and indirectly communicates and helps maintain moral behaviors.

As my fieldwork progressed, I soon realized that actions and characteristics attributed to the spirit child were often not about an "evil child" that had come into the family. Rather, they were used as a way to talk about a family member acting in an antisocial manner. Azuma's case is a good example. Over time, I began to see parallels between the discourse concerning spirit children and the behavior of Azuma's father. I was so struck by his anti-social behavior that I commented to Elijah that Azuma was not the one destroying the family; the real spirit child was her father.

The spirit child discourse—and to an even greater degree, the actual spirit child born into a family—is an embodied representation of the intersubjective space between reality and the moral imagination, between the house and the bush. The spirit child not only dwells in the moral imagination, but with the help of amoral or antisocial human acts, crosses over into this world and comes to personify the misfortunes that befall Nankani families.

Boundaries

The surveillance and maintenance of boundaries are a central theme present within the spirit child discourse and practices. Eating while walking, sex outside the home, and urinating in an exposed manner are reflections of the awareness of maintaining family boundaries. Spirit child discourse places significant emphasis on ways to manage human and spirit separations (or bush and domestic separations) and the consequences of transgressing these boundaries. From the Nankani perspective, spirits are always trying to find ways to enter the house in order to get the "good things" that come with being in house. A man remarked:

> The spirits that are in the bush are always trying to find ways and means to come to the house. In finding a way, they normally enter a woman's womb [and the woman] will give birth to them. After [the woman has] given birth to them, those spirits will now want to disturb the family. Sometimes when they want to go back to the bush, they will destroy the family, and the family will have to kill them before they can return to the bush.

As described earlier, the house is symbolic of the larger structure of the family and lineage. Community members made it explicit that the spirit child is "not for the house." This is reflected in all areas of the spirit child phenomenon, for example, burial. The spirit child is not buried in the ancestral house with others, but literally in the bush. The passage of spirits though the boundaries of the house is also a significant concern, in both physical and spiritual terms. As we saw earlier, one of the ways to detect a spirit child is to spread ash around the entrance of the room where the child and mother sleep. Come morning, if there are a child's footprints in the ash, it proves that the child arose in the night, went over the compound wall and visited the other spirits in the bush. The spirit child will not use the main exit in an effort to remain undetected by both humans and ancestors, but will use a rear exit or climb over the compound wall (an "unauthorized exit"). Similarly, family members who want to leave the house undetected will use the same alternative exit. Male elders expressed how the women of the house must use "approved" entrances and exits and indicated their need to maintain an awareness of and control over women's movements. In addition to illustrating one of the realities concerning the control of women's movement, what else do these concerns tell us about the relationship between women and the boundaries of the house?

The house is relatively safe and well protected from spirits. However, the entrances to the house are a potential gateway for spirits and are, consequently, under a great deal of surveillance. While there are some limited examples of how men can bring a spirit through the gateway into the house, there are many more parallels between the woman's body or bodily boundaries and the body of the house and family. The notions of the house and maintaining the boundaries of the house are metaphors for maintaining the behavioral and physical boundaries of women. Although the house is representative of the patrilineal system, it is also symbolic of the creative and womanly powers. Fertile women represent an opening into the house through their reproductive capabilities. In other words, women represent a vulnerable point in which good as well as frightening things are introduced into the family. Consequently, men guard this "gateway" to the house with vigilance. The only way a spirit child can enter the house is through birth into the family. Family members are conscious of the opportunities by which important boundaries can be transgressed and a spirit child and misfortune enter the family. I explore these key boundaries.

Eating

The most commonly described cause of a spirit child is eating while walking in the bush or while on paths. Families advise fertile women not to eat while walking outside of the home because a spirit, attracted to the food, will follow the woman, like her, enter her and subsequently enter the house when given the opportunity.

Gottlieb also identifies a similar taboo with the Beng people, although it is limited to women who are already pregnant. She remarked that paths represent "a liminal area between forest and village." The paths between the two key areas of forest and village are a "conceptual mediator" that are also dangerous to pregnancy, which is itself a liminal state (Gottlieb 1992:38). Among the Beng, if a pregnant woman eats while walking she may give birth to a snake child. The snake child, much like the spirit child, enters the woman because it wants to eat human food.

Paths among the Nankani are also liminal spaces between bush and the domestic place. When I further explored this taboo, I turned up concerns regarding the movement of food within the family. Eating while walking on the path not only symbolically represents a liminal space and the boundary between bush and domestic areas, it also involves controlling the movement of food. A man explained that if a woman is eating outside of the house, she is not eating with the family or she is stealing food from the family or from another person's field. Families do not permit women to take food from the man's granary without permission or to take food outside of the house.

Sex and Exposure

The spirit child discourse regularly turns towards sexuality and reproduction. Taboos and explanations concerning how women catch a spirit child highlight these themes. Since the goal of the spirit is to find any way possible to pass from the bush into the domestic space, the easiest way for a spirit to accomplish its goal is to enter a woman through illicit sexual activity or exposure.

There is a traditional sexual taboo against having sex in the bush or in an open or public space. Sex away from the home is illegal sex. Since most married couples do not need to hide in the bush to have sex, this taboo is directed primarily at unmarried couples, both those who are courting and those engaging in adulterous relationships. Traditionally, virginity at marriage is desired. Moreover, illegitimate children (*tabia*) are discouraged and unwanted, as families do not consider them a part of any lineage system and they have few if any rights within the family. This taboo also relates to extramarital relationships (*busi*), which have the potential to violate the boundaries of the family system and disrupt the lineage, particularly if they result in the birth of a child. Asorigiya describes the tabia resulting from an extramarital relationship: "That child is like someone who is not for the family. It is like when we sow sorghum. Over the years there are plants that just come up. We didn't sow them. They just came up on their own. They will not bear any fruit and we call such a plant *kanarega.* It won't bear fruit. That child is just like that." The taboo surrounding extra- or pre-marital sex is to prevent this outcome.

Gottlieb also describes how sex in the forest or fields is regarded as polluting and is typical of taboos that circumscribe elements of human activity to areas of the forest and village space (1992:32). I did not find evidence indicating that community members regarded sex in the bush as polluting the land, as it seemed that the taboo is primarily associated with maintaining family boundaries and restricting opportunities for extramarital relations. Although I did not find evidence indicating that the Nankani regard sexual pollution as offensive to the land, pollution associated with taboo sexual activities is a concern for the house. The taboos limit a man from entering the house and sleeping with his wife after engaging in other sexual relations. This taboo keeps the pollution and the related malicious spirits attracted to it, away from the house.

Taboos surrounding nighttime bathing for women and ensuring concealment when women relieve themselves are also measures to reduce the opportunity for the spirit child to enter and disrupt the family. The taboos relating to women's exposure as well as those regulating sexual activities exemplify the concerns surrounding women and the power that women have within the house. Taboos associated with these domains illustrate the desire to control the powerful dimensions of women's behavior and thus limit the boundary transgressions that have the potential to disrupt the family system.

Childhood Disability

Rapp and Ginsburg note: "The birth of anomalous children is an occasion for meaning-making, whether though the acceptance of Gods special angels or the infanticide of the offspring deemed unacceptable" (2001:536). Examining the wider meanings of disability and bodily boundaries can reveal a great deal, since the human body is not only a historical site, but a moral site as well. With illnesses and disabilities, as with the spirit child, particular bodily states can problemitize, mobilize, intensify or threaten the balance of social and domestic relations (Livingston 2005:2-3, 9).

Families express concern about the practical reproductive imperatives that on-going illness and childhood disability evoke. This concern emerges in part when the child is unable to reach certain developmental milestones. The two-year-old age range is key, since children are separating from their mothers at that time and are increasingly expected to be with and under the watchful eye of other children in the family. If, due to disability or illness, a child cannot run off with the other children soon after weaning, the child prevents the mother from working to her full capacity and prevents the parents from having another child.

Bodies are made "to speak powerfully about social problems and ultimate values." Moreover, "expressing social complexities in terms of body imagery is a way of trying to cope with those complexities and to develop some defenses against them." (Stewart & Strathern 2004:76). The spirit child and the physical abnormalities the child presents bring to the forefront not only a disruption of physical spatial boundaries that constitute Nankani notions of humanness and personhood, but also highlight the vigilantly guarded moral boundaries of the family. Confronting a disabled child can trigger the moral imagination and not only cause us to "consider the fragile and contingent nature of bodily life" (Livingston 2005:3) but also the broader moral issues connected to the local understandings of how such a disabled condition arises. Spirit child accounts place emphasis on maintaining local notions of normality within the family and monitoring what is considered normal bodily and behavioral characteristics of the child. A break in normal behavior and bodily boundaries indicates a rupture in the boundaries and body of the family and is indicative of possible moral or other threats.

When considering moral threats to the family, the spirit child brings to the forefront issues of kinship, identity, and reproduction (Rapp & Ginsburg 2001:536). The spirit child discourse also highlights a concern for paternity and the management of sexuality, as when exposing oneself in public and "illegal sex" are cited as causing a spirit child to appear. Families are vigilant about these themes, which can crop up in discussions about infidelity, "unchecked" sexual relations, illegitimate children, and illness. Any of these may result in the disruption or destruction of the family and the spirit child is involved in all these, since its primary goal is—as many community members indicated, "to wipe the entire family out." Hence, there is a great deal of boundary surveillance designed to prevent the entrance of a spirit child into the family, or from our perspective, antisocial acts contributing to the family's destruction.

Ambiguity

Earlier we saw how Nankani mothers are regarded as creative and life-giving forces as well as forces that can take life and threaten the integrity of the family. This is evident in the paradox discussed previously: the power to counter witchcraft is a form of witchcraft itself. Nankani mothers are central to the perpetuation of the lineage, but they are also viewed as having the power to destroy it through illegitimate births, witchcraft, and behaviors that bring spirit children.

Due to the complications inherent in intersubjectivity, Jackson regards all interpersonal and object relations to be blurred and ambiguous to one degree or another and maintains that some relationships and distinctions between the self and the other will be more ambiguous than others (1998:8). For the Nankani, these situations often occur in circumstances where individuals or family members perceive a lack of control or in cases where what is hidden and dangerous become apparent. That is, other people's subversive actions, the hidden and "darker sides of kinship" (Geschiere 1997), and one's relationship with external and non-domesticated forces, particularly the relationships associated with bush and the bush itself, are regarded with ambivalence.

Normally, people are able to function within ambiguous situations or relationships; however, when these relationships become increasingly blurred or obscured, or when boundaries are crossed, a crisis can result. Scholars such as the Comaroff and Comaroff (1993) emphasize how witchcraft rituals are a "means of responding to the ambiguities of modernity in post-colonial Africa" (Reynolds-Whyte 1997:204). Despite the increasing impact of development and modernity in the region, I found that the ambiguities associated with the spirit child are not necessarily associated with modernity, although they are undoubtedly affected by it. Rather, Nankani families associate the ambiguity related to the spirit child with family behavior and appropriate moral action.

In addition to the ambiguous physical traits of a spirit child, the narratives and symbolic elements associated with the spirit child are often steeped in ambiguity. Levi-Strauss identified that ambiguity appearing in myth is frequently left to a mediator to resolve. "Since his mediating function occupies a position halfway between two polar terms, he [the mediator] must retain something of that duality—namely an ambiguous and equivocal character" (1963:226). Such mediators are shape-shifters and tricksters, or beings endowed with "contradictory attributes" (Jackson 1982:43). The dongo and the spirit child in Nankani discourse function as mediators and are able to traverse boundaries, as seen in the narratives I presented. Within narratives and other forms of discourse, the spirit child mediates uncomfortable or ambiguous situations. In practice, the spirit child as a diagnosis mediates tensions and problems present within the family and can become a scapegoat (mediator) that displaces those tensions. Additionally, the dongo, in discourse and practice, is a way to treat, mediate, and resolve the ambiguity associated with the spirit child.

A neonate's "basic strangeness" or otherness is likely to be emphasized if the baby is born with abnormalities or under abnormal conditions. This basic strangeness is described as the "profound shock of misrecognition reported by some mothers on their first encounters with a newborn" (Scheper-Hughes 2004:225, Piers 1978) and can be exacerbated when a child is born under ambiguous conditions or has an ambiguous physical appearance. It is possible that the notion of basic strangeness contributes to decisions, ambiguity, and shock that is associated with spirit children.

A child, normal or abnormal, is thus born into a space of ambiguity within the family. If, in addition, a child is born under unusual conditions or with a disability, this ambiguity increases and the child's intentions within the family become increasingly unclear. "Is the child for the family, or is it not?" is a frequent question a father would ask the diviner. Divination and the evidence it provides is the first step in an attempt to clarify this ambiguity and find evidence indicating the intentions of the infant.

When a spirit child comes into the family, the family is not only concerned about its ambiguous embodied status, but also the larger themes its embodied status represents. In the diagnosis and treatment of a spirit child, we are seeing the transformation of uncertainty and ambiguity in an attempt to take control of a potentially dangerous situation confronting a *family*. I emphasize family because the spirit child is not simply a sickly or disabled individual child but, as we have seen, is enmeshed within the concerns of larger family system. Through the spirit child and the moral ambiguity associated with it, families focus on what is evident and visible as a way to better understand and grasp what is happening in the hidden realms and to bring to light the problem and achieve a clear resolution.

The Scapegoat

The symbolic dimensions of spirit children associated with misfortune are revealing. One of the more apparent elements within the spirit child phenomenon is how the child in some cases functions as a scapegoat for the family, not in an institutionalized recurring cycle, but as a way for the family to cope with unique and acute situations. Girard defines the scapegoat as two or more people that are reconciled, "at the expense of a third party who appears guilty or responsible for whatever ails, disturbs, or frightens the scapegoaters." The scapegoating process is unitive in a functional sense, since scapegoaters are offered relief of tensions as they coalesce into a more harmonious group (Girard 1996:12).

A spirit child associated with a string of misfortunes within the family comes to embody the disorder, ambiguity, and misfortune that the family wishes to eliminate. Family members are able to shift the attention and burden from its source in familial relationships and behaviors and displace them onto not the spirit child necessarily, but what the spirit child symbolically represents. The source of the misfortunes may be recognized or not, but is always acknowledged as stemming from a problem or issue within the family (i.e., a family member committing a taboo in the bush). Regardless of the precise source of misfortunes, sending the spirit child back to the bush effectively sends the antisocial events, transgressions, and other associations back to their wild and untamed origin outside of the family.

The post-concoction sacrifices and ritual are conducted not only to appease the dongo, but are also aimed at placating the spirit child, to offer what it wants so it will depart peacefully for the bush. The sacrifices and ritual associated with the spirit child ceremony also join suffering family members together, bring events under control, eliminate ambiguity, and purify and protect the parents and the house from future misfortune.

Relationship to Witchcraft

At times, elements within the spirit child discourse and its behavior within society make it appear as if it were similar to witchcraft. In this section I parse the similarities and differences between witchcraft and the spirit child. Like witchcraft, the spirit child is embedded within local moral systems (Moore and Sanders 2001). Jackson describes witchcraft as the embodiment of chaos and a result of people anxious about their control of the social world (Jackson 2005:139). From a broad perspective, witchcraft and the spirit child both function as attempts to control uncertainty and ambiguity; both are a reflection of a cultural model that expresses a particular experience of crisis (cf. Stroeken 2004:46) and both are enmeshed in local moral systems.

On a more detailed level, we see that both the actions of the spirit child and witches can make family members sick, kill them, or disrupt the family system. At a structural level, both could be considered a result of poverty, economic distress, or a lack of resources broadly defined. Both can also serve as a scapegoat within their families. I posit that these similarities exist because witches and spirit children represent two of the most serious moral threats to the family: they can kill family members and they disrupt the family system. Can we then regard the spirit child is a form of witchcraft?

The similarities between the two lie primarily in their broad functions within society and the people they affect. However, the specifics regarding how they work and the particular social and family concerns associated with each differ. A witch is a member of one's family and a result of one's matrilateral line. You are either born a witch or not. There is also an element of choice: persons can choose to use or not use the witchcraft powers they were born with for anti-social purposes. The spirit child does not catch souls, keep others souls, or eat people as witches do. The spirit child is a consequence of a taboo violation. The witch is associated with jealousy and consumption as well as notions of modernity, while the spirit child plays no role in the accumulation of wealth and responds differently in the face of modernity and globalization (see the following section). The witch is more closely associated with the hidden dimensions of power within the family. The spirit child hides as well, but usually reaches a point where it wants to expose itself, cause misfortunes and return to the bush, whereas witches remain concealed while they destroy. Witches also prey upon people, rather than cause general misfortunes like crop failure. Witches can be controlled and sometimes reformed, while a spirit child is neither a human nor a member of the family and cannot be exorcised or reformed. Finally, when I asked community members if the spirit child and the witch were similar they indicated that they were not alike.

Other scholars have pointed out how the ambivalence inherent in witchcraft powers permits its reinvention and allows the modern discourses associated with witchcraft powers to incorporate changes in novel situations (Moore & Sanders 2001:10, Geschiere 1997:13). While the notion of witchcraft is more malleable in the context of modernity, I found that of the spirit child to be more limited in its ability to adapt to changes resulting from development and modernity. I explore this further.

Migration and Modernity

Fred Binka, former Director of the NHRC, speculated that the solution to the spirit child phenomenon appears in the seeming abandonment of beliefs in the spirit child when residents migrate to urban areas in southern Ghana. According to Binka, migrants bring divination, chief-based social structures, and other cultural familiarities with them when they migrate. However, he makes the conjectural claim that the spirit child is left behind and asks, "How do you leave that behind? ... Somewhere in that mystery is the answer" (Lothian 1996). Binka's observation, though not supported by my findings (see below), does generate some important questions concerning the influences of the city and modernity on the spirit child practice and, in a larger sense, how social structures and beliefs migrate to and are influenced by urban areas.

While migration affects families in many ways, I found that beliefs and practices concerning the spirit child do not necessarily disappear when families migrate to cities in the southern sectors of Ghana. Not only do families not abandon their beliefs and social networks when migrating, but those who migrate remain connected to families at home in the North through visits, sacrifices, and remittance payments. In a case study, we saw how Esther's father sent her back to the North for treatment as a spirit child. I recorded another case where a woman gave birth to a disabled child in Kumasi and traveled north to have it treated as a spirit child. The child died before she could arrive, but they were able to perform the necessary ceremony to send the spirit away while visiting the North.

Another man living in Kumasi, who happened to be a relative of a concoction man I was working with, suspected his disabled child might be a spirit child. He planned to return to the North to have it tested, but later discovered that the child was not a spirit child and he did not need to make the journey.

While some families carry the spirit child beliefs with them to urban areas in the South, the treatment and ritual options remain fixed in the North and suspected spirit children must return to their ancestral land for treatment and burial. People throughout Ghana often recognize the North as a powerful source of ritual power due to its liminal status (Allman & Parker 2005). Although spirit children have the power to migrate, the ritual and treatment remains ecologically fixed within a person's clan territory and community in the North. While other shrines from the North have migrated to the South, and southern sorcery shrines and cults have moved northward, there is no indication that the dongo and related spirit child treatments are as mobile.

The North remains an important source of ancestral and ritual power for family members, and beliefs surrounding the spirit child, while mobile, cannot be addressed outside of their place of context. In other words, the efficacy of the dongo is closely connected to its ecological context. This is also understandable, in part, because urban areas from the Nankani migrant's perspective lack not only the ritual space—shrines embedded in the landscape—and power necessary to conduct the ritual, but also the necessary bush spaces needed to position and properly relocate the spirit child to its respective domain. A spirit child in the city cannot easily return to the bush and its own kind.

While witchcraft discourse and activity, which is closely connected to notions of modernity is, according to community members, becoming more prevalent, the spirit child phenomenon appears less prevalent than in the past. I do not feel that spirit child practices are become more hidden, rather the improvement in access to maternal and infant health care, vaccination programs, and increased food security has affected the incidence of the spirit child. These changes are, in part, a result of addressing the biological and ecological needs confronting families. Change and health interventions within the district may have some overall impact on reducing infanticide cases generally, but the impact is likely due to a reduction in mortality and the consequent use of the spirit child diagnosis to explain the death of children. That is, the interventions are affecting the use of the spirit child diagnosis as both a death-hastening practice and as an explanatory model for illness and natural death.

Biomedical beliefs are not supplanting traditional notions of causation but are being integrated and reworked into local understandings on their own terms, much in the way outside sources of knowledge, whether from the bush or beyond, are often incorporated into local understandings. For example, from a traditional perspective, if a woman violates a boundary by consuming a taboo food associated with a spirit, she may have a spirit child. The modern perspective describes how, if a woman drinks alcohol during pregnancy or uses a pharmaceutical drug—the new taboo—she may give birth to a disabled child—a spirit child. The agent of causation may be different, but the epistemological foundations of Nankani understandings remain the same. New explanations from the outside are easily integrated into or alongside traditional understandings, and adapting biomedical knowledge and notions of risk to local epistemological system is not a stretch in most cases.

Within a Different Context: Changelings, Euthanasia, and the Spirit Child

During the fieldwork and writing process, I found myself encountering stories similar to the Nankani spirit child, particularly within the Euro-American context. With Euro-American history, a characterization similar to the spirit child is that of the changeling, the belief that one's infant was taken and replaced by a similar yet abnormal being. Celtic folklore describes dwarves or other forest entities kidnapping and substituting one's child with a changeling (Briggs 1976:21). The Victorian period also offers evidence concerning the existence of abnormal children being put in place of normal children (Silver 1999).

A changeling most often appeared as a child with an "old, distorted face, a small or wizened body, and dark or sallow skin." They often exhibited physical disabilities, had an abnormally large head, and would not walk or speak. "But whether child or adult in form, the changeling was a creature noteworthy for its gluttony and peevishness, its lack of heart or soul, and its strange, malicious or ungovernable spirit" (Silver 1999:61). Thirteenth-century descriptions indicated how changelings were frequently unhappy, crying, and had insatiable thirst for milk. During the seventeenth-century in France, children born thin or small, or who cried excessively, were believed to be products of insemination by the devil (Hrdy 1999:466-468). An 1884 news article in the U.K. Daily Telegraph describes a case of a boy unable to use his limbs as a changeling left by fairies in exchange for the original child (Silver 1999:59). Many descriptions of the changelings are essentially spirit children in Victorian clothing.

Even fairy doctors specializing in treating changelings, much like the concoction men, appear in accounts. Changelings were also tested by family members and by specialists to determine their true origin. "Changeling tests or exorcisms practiced during the period … involved tricking the changeling into betraying its nonhuman nature by doing something preposterous before its eyes, such as making porridge, beer, or ale in an egg shell" (Silver 1999:64-65). Accounts also indicated that a child would be placed in the forest at night. If the fairies refused to take the changeling back, it would die. If at any point the changeling died, no infanticide could have occurred because it was not human (Hrdy 1999:465).

Much like the spirit child, meaningful connections between changelings and Victorian anxieties were embedded in changeling folklore and practices. Accounts indicate that people made connections between the reality of changelings and the unspoken belief that they were the result of incestuous or unnatural unions (Sliver 1999:6). Changeling deaths were also a successful way to probe and "provide explanations for sudden death or disappearance, mysterious illness, and eccentric and bizarre behavior." Changeling related beliefs and deaths also illustrate the local European concerns regarding disability and anxieties about difference, race, and class (Silver 1999:60).

In the modern Euro-American context, we see changelings of a different sort. Children that are born prematurely or with disabilities have the potential to foster similar concerns within family members. Rather than the dongo, biomedical technology becomes the mediator and way to assuage our anxieties surrounding abnormal or ambiguous births; such technology is however not without limits. Recent advances in medical technology have enabled medical professionals in post-industrialized countries to intervene in the birth of disabled, sick, or premature infants who would otherwise not survive. Although medicine can prolong the lives of such infants, often for lengthy periods, what is the emotional and financial cost to the family and the suffering child? Like the changeling or the spirit child, is euthanasia an option that some families consider? Despite the vast differences in context and resources available, there are similarities between the dilemmas, decisions, and challenges that Euro-American and Nankani families face in their response towards non-viable infants. Moreover, these differences and similarities communicate a great deal about the respective cultures.

The impact that such an abnormal or disabled child has on the family and the decisions that families must face are not new. Euro-American debates concerning active and passive euthanasia for non-viable or suffering infants and adults have been present since pre-modern times.[15] Although discouraged by church authorities, evidence indicates that practices designed to shorten the lives of dying patients had an accepted place in pre-modern popular culture (pre-1870s) (Stolberg 2007). Euthanasia practices have been an option in many societies, occurring with either open or closed recognition. Through examining euthanasia practices and policies in the Netherlands and the U.K., this section explains and positions how concoction-related spirit child deaths are more akin to euthanasia than to infanticide.

In the U.K in 2004, the Nuffield Council on Bioethics (NCB) established a working party to address the ethical, social, and legal issues that arise in critical-care decision making in fetal and neonatal medicine (NCB 2006). This working group was established after the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecology (RCOG) put forth an option to permit the "mercy killing" of the sickest of infants, indicating that, "active euthanasia should be considered for the overall benefit of families who would otherwise suffer years of emotional and financial suffering" (Elliott 2006). Physicians, ethicists, and other healthcare providers were also seeking guidelines on how to proceed in cases where the infant has little chance for survival or experiencing a life free from pain and suffering. There is some indication that active and passive forms of euthanasia are already occurring but are concealed (Elliott 2006).

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[15] Active euthanasia involves taking action to purposely hasten the death of a suffering or terminally-ill individual, whereas passive euthanasia involves withholding care to expedite death.

The Groningen Protocol sets guidelines concerning infant euthanasia in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, 600 of the 1000 infant deaths per year are preceded by a medical decision regarding the end of life. Such decisions are divided into three categories: 1) Infants with no chance of survival whatsoever; 2) Infants with very poor prognosis that are dependent on intensive care and who's prognosis and quality of life is poor; and, 3) Infants who experience unbearable suffering after intensive treatment has been completed and will have a poor quality of life and no hope of improvement (Verhagen & Sauer 2005:959-960). It is estimated that 10 to 20 infants, mostly part of the third group and suffering from serious congenital malformations such as severe spina bifida, are thought to be actively euthanized each year (Costeloe 2007:912). For euthanasia to take place, the diagnosis must be accurate and the prognosis hopeless. The baby's quality of life must be poor and he or she must be experiencing unbearable suffering despite optimal treatment (Costeloe 2007:912).

Despite the approval of euthanasia guidelines in the Netherlands, the Nuffield Council on Bioethics rejected any possibility of neonatal euthanasia in the U.K., since Council members considered that the indicators that a baby will be severely disabled or suffering throughout its life are not "foolproof" (Costeloe 2007:912-913). Euthanasia is not allowed regardless of how "intolerable" the baby's life might be deemed to be (NCB 2006:xxiii). The NCB concluded that only in cases where irremediable suffering results from the imposing or continuation of treatments would there be no ethical obligation to act in order to preserve that life (NCB 2006:xvi).

As I examined the Groningen Protocol and the NCB recommendations, I found myself considering the spirit child practice from the perspective of these protocols, and these protocols from the Nankani view. This was not an attempt to overlay or impose outside morals or standards upon the Nankani people, but an attempt to build a bridge of understanding between different moral worlds and possibly understand the guidelines from differing perspectives. I examine the more conservative NCB recommendations in detail.

Although it rejected euthanasia, the council did indicate that, "potentially life-shortening but pain-relieving treatments are morally acceptable" (NCB 2006:xxiii). This would include the administration of drugs that would relieve pain but hasten death.

Decisions to resuscitate premature infants must take into account their age but also the pain, suffering, and distress that the decision will inflict upon the *child*. The child's likelihood of being capable of establishing relationships with other people or experiencing pleasure of any kind must also be considered. Notably, all decisions regarding the infant must also account for the forms of support available in the family's community (NCB 2006:xxiii).

The NCB placed an emphasis on the best interests of the *infant* as to whether, "he or she will live or die, and the quality of life that might be enjoyed." These interests "are more important than the interests that others may have in any significant decisions made about him or her" (NCB 2006:xvii, 159). The NCB did recognize, although secondarily, the need to account for the parents' interests and wishes, since the "welfare of the baby is inextricably linked with the ability of the parents to care for and support him or her." They also recognized that, "Parents also have interests that are distinct from those of their baby. Caring for a baby with serious disabilities may harm their health, their relationship with a spouse or partner, and the welfare of any existing siblings" (NCB 2006:159-160).

The NCB's consideration of the family's wishes for the baby as secondary to the best interests of the infant is noteworthy. I question whether the strong focus on the baby's life, despite its suffering or debility, might be related in part to a more individualist understanding of personhood rather than an understanding of personhood as embedded in a larger social and family system. Recognizing the basis of personhood is fundamental to understanding how families make decisions surrounding ill or disabled infants in other contexts. The Nankani notion of a larger family-based personhood, as I described earlier, is central to understanding how families make decisions regarding children. I posit that the outcome of the NCB recommendations would have been much different if they had considered a family-centric perspective, that is, the suffering of the family and the impact of the child on the family as being equal to or greater that of the child's interests. The RCOG proposal to the NCB, which indicates that, "a very disabled child can mean a disabled family," attests to a more family-focused reality (Elliott 2006). This quote struck me as something that a Nankani family might understand. When examining spirit child or European euthanasia cases solely from an individualist perspective, that is, a focus on the individual child, one risks missing a family's fundamental desire for basic health and normalcy, and may end up prolonging the inevitable at the expense of the family, broadly defined.

The report caused me to consider more carefully the connections between the language used to describe euthanasia in severely ill or disabled infants. In the various publications and reports, scholars and practitioners did not refer to life-terminating practices for European babies as infanticide, although advocacy groups often use the term, partly for its inherent shock value. Why do scholars writing about intentional infant death in Europe use *euthanasia*, whereas anthropologists and others writing about similar practices among the ethnographic other use *infanticide*? Can we extend this descriptive specificity used to signify our own culture's death hastening practices to the ethnographic other? Granted, the anthropological use of infanticide has a standardized and objective scientific meaning. However, care should be taken with its use, since unfavorable associations are never far from the term. In any case, choosing more specific terms to describe infanticide practices akin to euthanasia represents a more specific description of the practice and is a representation that minimizes the negative connotations associated with infanticide.

The choice to send a severely disabled or ill spirit child back to the bush is not unlike euthanasia. In fact, euthanasia, rather than infanticide, is a more appropriate way to describe the intentional deaths labeled as spirit children.[16] The spirit child discourse indicates that there have been cases where families have facilitated the death of a child who was not terminally ill or severely disabled—although I never witnessed such a case—but such cases are rare exceptions and not definitive characteristics of the spirit child practice.

In the political-economic and ecological context of northern Ghana, the prognosis of spirit children who are chronically ill or disabled is unfavorable. Despite the lack of options that Nankani families have and the significant contextual differences, some of these fundamental issues at stake are similar for both Nankani and Euro-American families. Establishing this interpretive bridge through comparing the spirit child to a Euro-American practice is another way of examining, understanding the spirit child in practice. In both situations, families try their best to help such infants, but in some circumstances it is necessary to alleviate both the family and the child's suffering. Not all Nankani families with disabled or sick children conclude that their child is a spirit child, just as many families in North America or Europe do not choose euthanasia. The spirit child diagnosis, or euthanasia, is a difficult choice that families must make. It is not a hasty decision or regarded as an easy solution.

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[16] In this statement, I am referring to spirit child cases that involved actual death hastening activities, not spirit child cases where families use the spirit child as an explanatory model.

Concluding Thoughts

Approaching the spirit child from two major perspectives—both meaning centered and explanatory—this dissertation offered several descriptions and interpretations in its intent to clarify, interpret, and situate the spirit child phenomenon within the context of Nankani society. Within this dual approach, I first described the context in which the Nankani spirit child dwells and illustrated what the spirit child reveals about the Nankani sociocultural world. Second, I addressed specific questions regarding the characteristics and circumstances surrounding the spirit child phenomenon. Through this dual approach, I clarified the misunderstandings and issues present in studying and representing the spirit child. Being more holistic in its perspective and content, this approach also has implications for informing applied efforts.

Previous understandings of the spirit child described it as a form of ritual infanticide; however, this research uncovered significant variation and multivocality present in Nankani understandings of the spirit child, how it is enacted, and its role in accentuating the larger sociocultural process and issues at stake for the family and community. The Nankani spirit child is a metaphor and allegory for the grave concerns threatening the integrity and perpetuation of the family. Specifically, spirit children are a way for families to understand, make tangible, and directly act upon threatening or ambiguous circumstances and misfortunes.

This dissertation also clarified the specific circumstances surrounding spirit child diagnoses and death, questioning if it is indeed a form of infanticide at all. In actuality, families often use the spirit child as an explanatory model—primarily to understand the reasons and meanings behind childhood disability, child or family illness, and child and maternal mortality. I also identified that many of the spirit child diagnoses and ceremonies occur post-mortem and that no concoction is given. In the infrequent instances when family members facilitate a child's death using a concoction, the spirit child practice is more akin to euthanasia rather than an overt infanticidal act. Despite the variability in how the spirit child is understood and enacted, the comment that Joe made after we visited Nma still resonates for me and perhaps remains one of the more fitting ways to characterize spirit child deaths:

"Really, Aaron," Joe said. "The child, she is suffering. The family wants to set her free."

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APPENDIX A

Glossary of Nankana Terms

Baagre – Sorcery, juju power, or medicine.

Baare – A granary.

Baga (bagadanna) – The term for a diviner. Also used to describe juju men or sorcerers.

Bakoldoore – The stick, derived from the root of a sacred tree from the matrilateral side. It is used to identify objects during divination session.

Bakologo – All of the divination items involved in divination. Also refers to the ancestral shrine or powers associated with divination.

Bisi – Clan.

Budigla – Male child.

Bunbunlia – An herb commonly used in the concoction for spirit children.

Busi – Extramarital relationship.

Butila – Billy goat.

Chichuru – Spirit child in the language of Kassem. Literally translates as "dwarf."

Dawa-dawa – Dried and fermented locust beans.

Dia – Food.

Dongo – Horn. Also used to describe the medicines that are often kept within it. Also signifies the ritual item used to send the spirit child back to the bush.

Dongodaana – "Master of the horn," or concoction man. The ritual practitioner that sends the spirit child to the bush.

Guure – Ants.

Ken-ensigire – An undead or zombie-like entity.

Kinkirigo – The term for spirit children for Gurenne speaking groups living near Bolgatanga.

Koko – A deceased witch or person with witchcraft power that has died and come back to life in an animal from. It is only visible to those with nifo.

Kologo – Bag.

Kolego – A guitar made from a calabash shell and animal hide.

Kulkariga (pl. Kulkarsi) – A common term for a bush spirit.

Loco – A quiver for arrows. Symbolic for a man. Used symbolically in funerals.

Nenga – Convulsions.

Nifo – The eye. The ability to be able to see witches or spiritual things.

Nma – Mother.

Nerisaala vua - Normal human being.

N'peligoho – To reveal or leak someone's secret. Usually said when discovering and making public that someone is a witch.

Nso – Father.

Nsoyaaba – A great- or grand-ancestor.

Obroni – In the Twi language, it is the word for "whiteman."

Pa-ala – A symbolic item ensuring the child's success in this world and represents its destiny. It is often a bracelet.

Panga – Power or strength.

Pito – A beer made of sorghum.

Seto – A flesh eating monster.

Sinyaka – The rattle made from a gourd used during divination sessions to call and entertain the ancestors.

Sisigo (pl. Sisito) – A spirit child. Literally translates as "dwarf."

Sisigo ditago – A good spirit child. Brings good fortune to the family.

Soa – Witchcraft.

Solmiya – The Nankana word for whiteman.

Soputo – A person who can "see" witches. A witch him/herself, but chooses to use his or her witchcraft powers for good purposes.

Tabia – An illegitimate child.

Tia – Tree.

Tindana – Master of the earth. A family landlord that regulates land use conducts necessary sacrifices related to the ancestors and the land.

Tiim – Medicine. Depending on context, it is a medicine that can be used to help or harm.

Tingane – Clan ancestral shrines located in groves of trees (tia = tree).

Tizi – A term used to describe a mental disturbance.

T.Z. or Tuo Zaafi – Thickened porridge ball made with millet flour.

Wakayarum – "Dust Devils" or small twisters. Spirits often travel this way in the form of wind.

Yaaba – Ancestors.

Yaale (pl. Yale) – The symbolic objects used in divination.

Yiri – The house. Also used to signify the family.

Yooka – A gourd fruit used to make calabashes.